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LEGENDS OF INDIA

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ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF RELIGION

ETHICS OF INDIA

THE GREAT EPIC OF INDIA

INDIA, OLD AND NEW

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LEGENDS OF INDIA

By

Washburn Hopkins

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PREFACE

THESE Legends *are not translations of native Hindu poems, but embody a re-interpretation of tales told long ago in India, chiefly by those who were ethical or religious teachers. They seized upon various stories and adapted them to their needs. In doing so they inserted moral instruction, as they modified characters and scenes to serve the purpose of edification. Thus in the charming story of Ganges, the goddess is made to sacrifice herself primarily for the sake of reviving the bones of saints and in her fall she is lost in Shiva's hair—priestly and even sectarian perversions of an older and better version, as I think. So the character of Battlestrong, as the perfect orthodox king, has been palpably softened down and made to conform to correct usage. In this and other cases I have endeavored to tell the tale as I conceive it to have been before it was tampered with, to remove the priestly interpretation and re-interpret the story as it should have descended to us, with the emotional implications (suppressed by the priests) intact.*

The legends of the first group are found for the most part in the Mahabhárata, *the great Hindu epic. The group following these represents salient points of the epic story itself, which I have tried to connect closely enough to show how the different scenes follow one another in the original, although in that original (as in the* Iliad) *the bulk of description is found in battle-scenes, here almost entirely ignored.*

The native epic employs various meters, a liberty I have assumed for "Arjuna." The only bit really translated is the opening line of "Arjuna," which reproduces the Katham samabhavat (*"how arose the strife?"*) *of the Sanskrit. One of the epic scenes has already been published in part in my* India, Old and New.

Sanskrit names I have sometimes translated and sometimes, when not too uncouth, left in the original form. The final a *of masculine names is dropped at will, as in Shiv or Shiva, Arjuna or Arjun. The hero Arjuna* (*a word connected with* argentum) *is a Knight in the sense that he is of the Warrior-caste and as an Aryan* (*noble*) *has been admitted into the privileges of his caste only after his qualifications have been tested in a formal tournament or display of warrior ability. Tourneys were held for this purpose in the case of all noblemen, and, as will be seen, tournaments were also staged in an amphitheater when a maiden of royal or knightly caste made her "choosing," that is, chose as her husband one of the knights who entered the tournament as suitors for her hand.*

The letter j *in Sanskrit is pronounced as in English, for example, in* Arjuna, *as in* Raja.

W. H.

New Haven, Connecticut.
May, 1928.

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THE SUNMAID

A princess fair, whose sire ruled Madraland,
Loved a poor hermit's son, who, having naught
Save beauty, strength, and virtue, for her hand
Offered these three and won the prize he sought.
Sunmaid they called her, for her radiant air
And sunny smile, which did her nature prove;
And him, since truthfulness in man is rare,
Albeit men profess the truth to love,
To suit his honest character, the name
Of Truthful, people gave, because, in sooth,
If Truthful promised aught, it was the same
As if 'twere done. A simple-hearted youth
Was he, though wise enough to love. So great
His sinewy arms, such brawn therein did lie,
That all admired him, saying, "Even Fate
"Could scarce o'erthrow him, till he chose to die."
But heartless Fate, well-pleased to mock the blind,
Said to the gods, "Let Truthful die when young,"
And, though no eye could see the shape behind,
Death, like a tiger, to his footsteps clung.
But Nar'd, the seer, who knew what Fate had willed,
Rebuked the maiden: "Daughter, wed him not,
"For he is doomed. His voice and vigor stilled
"In one short year will be, and death will blot
"His virtues out forever. Wouldst thou live
"Deprived of hope, thy pillow wet with tears?
"Not even sleep, the comforter, can give
"Comfort to widowed hearts. Thy future years

"Will all be woe." But Sunmaid said, "I grieve
"O sage revered, to disregard thy voice;
"But though my ears thy baleful word receive,
"Yet he I love remains my only choice.
"Since, if Fate wills and 'tis determined so
"That Truthful in a year must surely die,
"Will it not soothe him when he lieth low
"In death, to feel that one he loves sits by;
"That his last look may linger on my face
"And that his failing hand may cling to mine,
"And that his dying thought may still embrace
"And lead me on? For love, the power divine,
"Outlasts our earthly lives." Then said the seer:
"Well hast thou spoken, Sunmaid, all untried
"And yet so wise! Earth's hours indeed appear
"But as the marriage-morning to the bride,
"When fear still lessens love; but with day o'er
"When comes the night, then love is perfect made,
"And greater joy then ere we knew before
"Disarms the dark whereof we stand afraid."
Bright shone the Sunmaid's eyes to hear his word
Half understood. "Then let the morn be free
"Of care," she said, "and when Fate's call is heard
"I go with him. Shall love call piteously
"On loved ones from Death's chamber? For what gain
"Were this to me, to let him steal away,
"While I, who should go too, with weeping vain
"Wander outcast and find no place to stay?
"Nay, rather, as he takes my willing hand

"For life and death, so, when he goes above,
"Will I for life and death beside him stand,
"And see how heaven perfects this earthly love."
So with that stripling was the Sunmaid wed,
Who left a court to grace his hermitage;
Yet unto Truthful nothing had she said
Of that dark secret told her by the sage.
But in the hour when they together stood
Before the holy fire and spoke the word
That made them one, a low voice chilled her blood
Crying, "A year today"; which when she heard,
She clung to him and trembled, clasping tight
His sheltering form, till he spoke soothingly,
In marvel at her, thinking all was right
In their two lives, and chid her lovingly.
Ever devout she lived, obedient
To him she wed, and served his mother old
And his blind father. As a sunbeam sent
To keep their aged hearts from growing cold,
She to his parents seemed. So blest, that year,
Glided the swift moons holding death apart,
That she nigh lost her dull presaging fear
And in love's loss of memory calmed her heart.
But once she waked from morning's sleep and lay
Shuddering, conscious how the months had fled,
Knowing the year was passing and the day
When died the year he also should lie dead.
Then from the pillow soft she raised her face,
Peered through the dark and found his darker hair,
And felt him warm and resting in his place

And could no more forget, but let despair
Engulf her spirit: "O fond and sleeping eyes,
"That ye should see no more! O mighty arms,
"That ye should lose your strength! O breast and thighs
"So full of pulsing life, which frightening charms,
"Why must ye perish? Who has followed Death,
"To know if truly life beyond be sweet?
"Life here's enough. Oh, stay and let my breath
"Still animate thine; oh, clasp me, hands and feet;
"Stretch out thy arms and hold me to thy breast;
"And let us hide each other, till Death go by,
"Or, seeing, spare us, pitying me distressed.
"O all too dear, O love, that thou shouldst die!"
Therewith she sobbed aloud and bending down
Buried her face beside him, till alarmed
He from his slumber woke and first with frown
And then with gentle smile her terror calmed,
Deeming a dream had stirred her heart to weep;
And thus they silent lay, but wakeful still,
Till soon the sun laughed all the world from sleep
And Truthful sought his toil nor thought of ill.
But when he went, beside her marriage-bed
She crouched and counted all the moons that fast
Going had left her vainly comforted
By baseless dreams of heaven, until at last
A fresh thought roused her mind, remembering all
Which holy priests had told her, how they taught
That penance hard made audible the call
Of man to gods and prayer had wonders wrought.

Then softly on her darkened heart there stole
The first warm beams of gentle dawning hope,
And soon a light exultant filled her soul,
As she by prayer and pain resolved to cope
With Yama, god of death, and gain the power
To claim a boon. So to her daily task
She added long devotions, hour by hour
Fitting herself through fast and praise to ask
For that great gift. Thus faint and worn she went,
Burdened but brave, upon her troubled way,
Till the last moon forsook the firmament
And the year's round brought in its final day.
Now when that morn arrived and Truthful said,
"Farewell," and would be gone, she moveless stood
Blinded by grief; then she her courage led
To smiling speech and answered: "To the wood
"I too would go today and, watching thee,
"Sit near." But Truthful laughed: "Forsooth, 'twere
well
"To court a needless labor. Nay, for thee
"Too long a journey 'tis, since I must fell
"Trees far away, and hot the sun; but strong
"Am I to endure all this, while thou art weak,
"A woman, born for housing." "Thou art wrong,"
The father said, "Son, take her. Let her seek
"The leafy trees and watch thee. She is ill,
"And overwrought with toil; her limbs demand
"A space of restful ease; for she has still,
"Though a weak woman, been the upholding hand
"To those who sink with age, the eye to those

"Who see no more. The little change and rest
"Will do her good. So, till the day shall close,
"And eve's long shadows gather in the west,
"Give her this pleasure." "As thou wilt; 'tis naught,"
Said Truthful, "Come then; ere the sun ascend,
"Let us away. The day for me is fraught
"With toil; but thou mayst idle till its end."
Then Truthful led her forth. Upon his arms
Hung bow and axe and on his lips a song.
But she behind him went and brooded charms
To stay Death's hand and loose his whirling thong,
Until he said: " 'Tis here I fell the trees.
"Rest now, my Sunmaid, watch me while I make
"Their great arms tremble." But she clasped his knees
(For now her soul with passionate dread did quake)
And cried: "Work not. The sun is rising high
"And fierce will be the heat. Sit by my side,
"Lest evil come from yonder scorching sky
"And smite thee. Love, today I was thy bride
"One year ago and this our marriage-day.
"Were it not well for once to let work be,
"And talk of love? Oh, let me hear thee say,
"As thou didst then, that I am dear to thee."
But Truthful wondering said: "How dull am I!
"Is this the day? And art thou skilled to tilt
"With time's exact divisions? Bye and bye
"We will e'en talk of whatsoe'er thou wilt;
"But now I must indeed complete my toil,
"Or pay for lazy leisure far too dear

"With later effort; first the sweat and moil,
"Then will we love debate and this good year."
No more she said, but silently obeyed
Her lord's last word and sat where she could see
His vigorous strength, the while within the shade
She prayed to Death and hoped despairingly.
But as beneath the trees she fought with Fate,
Looking at Truthful, whose huge blade swung round,
Making the rocks and trees reverberate
And filling the far ether with wide sound,
Suddenly crashing flew his wingèd axe
Deep in the jungle-bed and she beheld
His form sway back and forth, his might relax,
And his huge limbs to awful peace compelled.
Powerless she sat, while, for a moment long,
Horror's quick finger stopped her pulseless heart.
But then again she made her soul grow strong
And staggering up approached, yet saw no art
Of plant or prayer with Truthful could avail,
For Death, already there, had hemmed his breath.
Then in her lap she laid his head and pale
She pressed her lips to his, and lo! there Death
Stood, noosing him she loved. Her quivering soul
Shook as she saw that Presence dim, yet fierce
And terrible to view. Ghostlike he stole
Beside her, yet his flaming eyes did pierce
Her withering sight. His robe was black and red;
A red-gold crown upon his brow he wore;
Of shadowy shape was he, like day half dead;
But plain in hand his throttling noose he bore.

Then prayed she to the Lord who rules the South,
"O Yama, god of death, receive my prayer;
"Let not the stammering utterance of my mouth
"Be vain with thee. O god, his eyes do stare
"So horribly upon me and his lips
"Grow cold as mountain waters. Lord, be kind.
"Send back the warm blood to his finger-tips;
"Revive his heart and from his soul unbind
"Thy knotted noose. Ah, Death, so many more
"There are who love not and who fain would die,
"Canst thou not choose from these and pass us o'er?
"Why him, O god? O pitiless, hear my cry."
But speaking not, Death showed her Truthful bound,
About his soul the noose, and sped away.
Then she laid down his body on the ground
Gently and followed Death. But hard to say
The road she ran, who stumbling never flagged.
Back from no toil nor terror would she turn,
Till Death, who felt her there, a moment lagged
And called to her: "Thou hast transgressed the bourne.
"Go quickly hence or else the noose shall bind
"Thy soul as well." "Yea, Lord," the Sunmaid said,
But ever as before crept on behind,
Not loath to follow where her love had led.
And then a second time Death sought to bend
Her stubborn will and shouted, "Forth, away;
"Kindness I know not. Soon thy life will end."
"Yea, Lord," she said, and came behind alway.
But yet a third time, looking, Death again,

Scorning her toil and her, said, "Thou must die;
"Thou canst not now return; but for thy pain,
"If other wish within thy spirit lie,
"And for thy courage in thus daring Death,
"I grant it thee." Then hope illumined her face,
That being kinder yet he might to faith
Grant even the greatest boon, and she her place
Behind him held. But that unyielding king
Looked not again and southward strode before,
While she persisted in her following,
Against all reason hoping evermore,
Till lo! Death sudden stopped and drew anear
And, wonder past all wonders, slipped the noose
From Truthful's soul and said: "Be of good cheer.
"Love fearing naught wins all. Behold, I loose
"My captive. Take him. Go." Therewith the god
Relaxed the cord and to the dauntless wife
Gave up the soul and lonely onward trod;
But they returned to happiness and life.

SUNDA AND UPASUNDA

Sunda and Upasunda two demons were of yore,
Who, mighty grown through evil, subdued the gods in war.
For gods are good and virtue at last will conquer wrong,
But oft it lies defeated while evil waxes strong.
To heaven the fiends ascended with passions uncontrolled;
They touched the throne of Indra and Indra's heart grew cold.
They scorned the good Immortals; with poisonous clouds they fell
Upon the heavenly army and cast the gods to hell.
Then fear beset all creatures, o'er every land was dearth,
For rain and sun no longer refreshed the men of earth.
In hunger and in darkness, from hamlet and from town,
The altar-smoke ascended to charm some blessing down.
Till shame seized the Immortals: "For help our children call,
"While we in honest battle before the demons fall.
"What helped us rules of warfare to honor as we fought,
"When evil tricks and poison our valor put to naught?

"Let us too turn to cunning, that good may conquer sin.
"O god of crafts, through magic, through trickery, must we win."
The Craftgod pondered deeply, the wisest course he sought;
The fate of gods and mortals hung on his wily thought.
At length he answered: "Bring me, each god, his fairest maid;
"Nor fear the use of magic, if virtue's cause it aid."
Then from the choicest maidens that grace th' Immortals' train,
And from the fairest damsels that men sigh for in vain,
He wrought one perfect woman. Her form was stately, tall,
And Love and Longing lingered, as handmaids on her call.
Patterned from all he made her; the best of earth and sky
Had lent her all perfections; no look could pass her by.
Thus the great Craftgod wrought her, the wraith called Perfectness,
And said: "Go, charm the demons; aid thou the gods' distress."
She heard him, knew his meaning; she smiled and she was gone.

The gods themselves desired her, e'en as they sped her on.
But up she flew and entered the heavenly gate above
And gliding past the demons inflamed their hearts with love.
"Mine is she," shouted Sunda, and sprang from Indra's seat.
"Back, back," cried Upasunda. Swift as their speeding feet
Ran the quick words of anger. Both rushed to her apace,
Drawn by the mystic beauty that shone upon her face.
But over each the maiden threw like a net her charms,
And unto each extended with tempting glance her arms.
Then each for each felt hatred; both claimed her as their bride.
"Be mine, be mine," they shouted. She smiled on each and sighed.
They turned them from the maiden in love-begotten hate
And brother smote his brother till, meeting both their fate,
They perished through their weakness, through jealousy and rage.
Then came the maiden downward and found the heavenly sage.

" 'Tis done," she whispered softly, "the path to heaven is clear.
"The gods again have conquered; the world is free from fear."
The gods went up triumphant and joyful seized their own,
And on the earth glad mortals worshiped their might unknown.
But the great Craftgod, lingering, Perfection took aside.
"Too fair art thou," he murmured, "O beauty deified;
"Too fair for the Immortals, too deadly fair for men;
"If gods should battle for thee, what saved our heaven again?
"If earth could hold thee, maiden, what man for heaven would care?
"O perfect form of beauty, dissolve and turn to air."
Then passed he o'er her forehead his gentle skilful hand,
And where had stood Perfection he saw a cloudlet stand,
Which mounted, gold and crimson, with heaven's ascending lords.
So seeking still Perfection men clamber heavenwards.

MANDAVYA

Hear ye this ancient story
Of one who did not die;
A story which is told us
By them that scan the sky.
There was a saint Mandavya
Lived ages long ago,
Whose thoughts were high and holy;
No evil did he know.
He stood one evening praying
Within his cavern dim;
Two thieves came, bringing booty,
And passed the night with him.
He knew not they were evil,
But knew the guest-law well:
"Who scorns the guest and stranger,
Himself is scorned in hell."
He gave them food and water;
His rushes made their bed,
And they were soon a-sleeping,
While still his prayers he said.
But, ere the dawn, came watchmen
And, rushing in, they found
The thieves they had been hunting
And booty on the ground.
"What hast thou done, Mandavya?
"Is this thy virtue high,
"Thy cave the den of robbers?
"Now thou with them shall die."

They dragged the saint and sinners
At morn before the king.
"What will ye?" cried the monarch,
"What men are these ye bring?"
"Two thieves and him that hides them;
"Behold the spoils," they said.
"Impale the three together;
"And watch till they be dead."
"God Justice wills it," cried they,
And him for justice's sake,
With the two thieves beside him,
Impaled upon the stake.
Now the two wicked robbers
Shrieked as the stakes went in
And writhed about in anguish
And perished for their sin.
But to the saint Mandavya
A host of spirits came;
Like birds, with pinions fanning,
They kept alive life's flame.
But when the troubled watchers
Saw that he would not die,
They ran and found their monarch
And told this mystery.
Then was the king astounded
And 'gan with fear to quake
And hurrying cried, "Forgive me,"
And tried to draw the stake.
But what within had entered
Could not be drawn again;

The surface healed, but inly
Remained the hidden pain.
To him forever after
The name Impaled was given,
Who died not like a mortal,
But went alive to heaven.
There spoke he to god Justice:
"Thy name much woe has wrought;
"When Justice acts unjustly,
"Then righteousness is naught.
"Since thou art an immortal
"And canst not die, go down
"And live with humans, learning
"How small is thy renown."
Because the saints are mighty,
His word in heaven had worth,
And Justice, incarnated,
Was cast from heaven to earth.
Hence when men cry for justice
To heaven, there's none who hears;
But sometimes, mid the righteous,
Justice on earth appears.

KING NIMI

Nimi is the king whose fleeting
Image lovers see when, meeting
With forbidden tender glances,
They reveal the joy which dances
In their eyes and cry, 'Behold him.'
There he sits, the king of seeing,
Iris-throned. But once a being
Human was he, royal, mighty,
Till a curse his spirit knightly
Caught, and from that time controlled him.

Once a priest, when Nimi met him,
Scowled. Cried Nimi, pleased to fret him,
"Reverend Sir, what foolish question
"Thus impairs your soul's digestion?"
Quick are priests to take offense.
"You who without provocation
"Ridicule the trepidation
"Of a saintly soul, I curse ye
"With a curse, to reimburse me
"For a king's impertinence.

"Shrink and dwindle, smaller faring."
Then he shrank, for good men swearing
Curse not vainly. Nimi shouted,
"Priest, your saintship ne'er I doubted.
"Please forgive me; do not slay me."

Then the priest (who merely thought to
Free his soul of spleen, which sought to
Vex his saintliness), relenting,
And already half repenting,
Cried, "Halt, curse, I stop thee, stay thee."

But the trouble with a curse is
That the more it runs it worse is.
Once it starts it keeps on working,
Bent on duty without shirking;
Its alacrity is appalling.
So then Nimi, faint with terror,
Screamed, "Good priest, I was in error;
"Though I vow I know no longer
"What I said; but you're the stronger.
"Lord, preserve me." Nimi calling

Heard the priest, all anger ended.
"If my curse can be suspended,"
Answered he, "by thought or praying,
"I'll suspend it," and, thus saying,
He began an incantation.
"Hurry, hurry," cried the poor king,
"If you don't, my death's a sure thing;
"Say it faster. This reduction
"Will result in my destruction
"And complete annihilation."

Ha! The holy priest outprayed him
In his diminution, stayed him

On the brink of execution;
But he sought in vain solution
Of the problem now before him,
How to make the king meander
Backward, to a stature grander,
Till at last in desperation
Sighed he, "If some habitation
"Fitted to your size"—when o'er him

Flashed a thought, quick uttered, "Try this;
"Take your refuge in the iris;
"Live forever, bright and beaming!"
Thus the king did, who, still gleaming
In the iris, beams, not speaking,
But rejoicing in love flowing
Out of sparkling eyes and growing
Dim in sympathy with sorrow,
Faint today, but bright tomorrow—
So immortal is the wee king.

THE DEMONS' ALTAR

Upspoke a priest: A tale of war; the demons twain,
whom we abhor,
And Indra, third, whom we adore—what did they
once together, building, building?
The demons twain, and Indra, the third one, why
were they building,
They, the black-haired ones, he, the red-handed
Thunderer, Indra?
Wisdom of Indra, folly of demons!

Out from the underworld crept the black-haired
ones.
Down from the great stream, flowing through cloud-
land,
Indra descended. Then the black-haired ones, evil in
spirit,
Nowhere the thunder of Indra perceiving,
Cried: " 'Tis the moment, up! Let us upward
"Build a great altar, firm on the earth and
"Reaching to heaven. Thereby ascending, we, the
black-haired ones,
"Mighty as Indra, him of the red hand, shall unto
ages
"Known be and honored. Even as gods go exalted in
cloudland,
"So shall we demons walk proudly in heaven."
Then, his red thunder-bolt holding, concealing,
He of the red hand, Indra, the war-god,

Laughed in his heart and
Came to that building.

"Strangers, who build here, what are ye building?
"Fair is the work, but here is a fairer
"Stone than ye have there."
Answered the demons: "Altar-stairs build we,
"One on another heaping the stones up,
"Higher than mountains;
"Whereby ascending we shall as gods be,
"Living in heaven, the city of Indra."

Smiling responded Indra, advancing:
"Aiding I greet you, building beside you.
"I too, ascending, fain would see Indra's
"Wonderful city. Lo! In your altar
"Place I this stone here, helping your building.
"Precious the stone is, gleaming like crystal;
"When ye have finished your labor ambitious,
"Needing the stone I haply may claim it."

Angrily answered both the black-haired ones:
"Fair is thy stone, but thou not upon it
"Mountest to heaven, for ours is the altar.
"Only the stone there thine is, so take it
"When we have finished, or now if thou darest.
"But with us never shalt thou, despised one,
"Mount up to heaven; away with thee, beggar!"

So they responded, building an altar,
Cairn for their burial, they the black-haired ones.

Up to the river, flowing through cloudland,
Indra his own path took and below him
Watched them at work there. Watching, he waited.

Year-long the demons labored and builded,
Till the great altar rose to the river
Flowing through cloudland, high under Indra's
City ascending; till to the threshold
Under the door of heaven the work stood,
While the black-haired ones, resting triumphant
There on the topmost stone of that altar,
Shouted: "We also gods are, like Indra,
"High as the great gods. Scorn to the red hand!"

Out leaped the red hand, stretching from heaven and
Touched the fair stone that deep underneath them
Indra had planted. "Thus I my own again
"Take," and he drew it forth from the altar.

Crash! Like an avalanche hurled from Himálaya,
Tumbled the altar. Down fell the demons,
Shrieking, and round them, crushing their life out,
Hurtled the huge stones. Red was that altar,
Blood was upon it; dead lay the demons,
Staining the earth, and o'er them in cloudland
Indra sat laughing.

THE IDOL

He knows not love who would not die for love,
He loves not honor who could honor lose,
Nor honors worthily he the gods above
Who to his god would any gift refuse.
Thus sung a maid to softly fingered lute,
Dreaming of love and thinking she was wise
In all its secrets, till love made her mute,
When truth, once hid, she saw without disguise.
There lived no man who loved this maid, but her
The god she worshiped loved, for none could see
Her beauty coldly, but his worshiper
Thought not that in a heavenly spirit could be
So base a thing as passion and at his shrine
Paid him devotion meek and, strewing flowers
Before the idol, praised his might divine,
Or, sunk at prayer in evening's thoughtful hours,
Begged him for boons, that he a fitting mate
Would render blest in her and she, no less,
Might unto him her life make consecrate
In purity. Thus oft would she address
The patient god and faithful love to him
Promise, if he, whose mind was so benign,
Her supplication heard. With visage grim
The god in silence sate and gave no sign.
Then once, as she, fronting that idol, stood
And made her prayer, the image cracked apart,
And to her startled eyes the gilded wood
Showed underneath a hotly beating heart,

And from the mask above, a face, where lust
Burned, thrust itself. That uncontrolled desire
Frightened her soul and sinking to the dust
She shuddered dumb before the altar-fire
Of him she had revered and now abhorred
As less than god or man. But when her breast
Grew quiet and she looked again, the adored
Image well known, remote, answered her quest
With gentle smile serene and placid eyes,
Masked as before, and she with senses lamed
By these bewildering changes' swift surprise,
Knew not if he her innocence had shamed,
Or if herself had him misseen and wronged.
But quickly to her chamber then she sped
And there the things for which her heart had longed
Considered thoroughly, lying on her bed
With staring eyes that would not close in sleep,
Till she at last began to understand
And, from her cogitations long and deep
Springing impetuous, took her lute in hand
And, tuning low the strings, her old refrain,
Who To His God Would Any Gift Refuse,
Murmured and smiled and hummed the song again,
As loath the thought's devotion pure to lose.

Fame sometimes for a weakling no less loud
Than for a hero blows the blatant horn,
Making the wretch immortal for man's scorn,
And such was Dasarath, the king of Oude,
Father of Rama, his first-born, whose name
Men worship as divine. Now Kaikeyi,
Whose son was Dasarath's youngest, even as she
His latest wife had been, endured the shame
Of being almost first but never quite,
Until she hated Rama, and the part
He played sought shamelessly with all her art
For Bharat, her own son. So on a night
When Dasarath was gracious to her, she said:
"Dost thou remember, many years ago,
"Thou didst once kiss me, saying 'When I know
" 'How much thou lov'st, thy love shall be repaid
" 'By any boon thou askest?' " Then the king
Laughed at her words and answered, "In those days
"Thou couldst not say. What? Are love's hidden ways
"Less hidden now?" "Yea, Lord," she said, "This thing
"Grows easy in time like others. Now I see
"What then was dubious. When my love I scan,
"I must confess it great as that great man
"To whom 'tis given." Then he began to be
Pleased with her wisdom, answering, "Name the boon.

"I did not think thou hadst so subtly guessed;
"For thou art fair, not witty, and at thy best
"In loving, not in knowledge. Though not soon
"Comes thy response, yet take at once the prize
"And say what thou dost choose." Thereat the queen,
Loosening her arms, sat up and with a mien
Less loving answered angrily: "Hast thou eyes,
"And seest thou not how sick and sourly fed
"My heart is always? Ever about thy throne
"One form I notice, hear of one alone.
"But Bharata, thy son, is as one dead
"Unto his father's sight. 'Tis Rama holds
"Thy heart and kingdom; Bharat, lost afar,
"Is like some small unnoticeable star
"Obscured by moonlight; heaven forsooth enfolds
"But while enfolding hides it. Grant to me
"Therefore this boon, long promised. Thou hast bid,
"And speak I will. Let Rama straight be hid
"In outer darkness; banished let him be
"For fourteen years—my boon! When they have passed,
"He may return, if still he lives. But go
"With Sita, his wife, he must. Thus shall I know
"Whether a king by what he swears stands fast."
Then grieved the king, yet grieving unto death
He dared not break his oath, and his dear son
Banished. But sorrow for the deed ill done
Shattered his frame, till Yama took his breath
And weakly good he died. Thus Bharat's hand
Held now the scepter ruling all the north,

While Rama and Sita, wandering lonely forth,
Sought a safe refuge in the southern land.
And Kaikeyi was happy, for she thought
"There will they perish, Rama and Sita too,
"But we shall rule and make no more ado
"About dead kings and what their folly wrought."
Yet Bharata, though crowned, yet found his seat
Cushioned with thorns that pierced his very soul;
And when he ate, the royal viands stole
Like poison to his heart and made the meat
Bitter to taste. Though living, yet as dead
Mutely he moved, hearing reproaches loud
Uttered by whom he knew not, while the crowd
Of courtiers praised him; and even music said,
"Base, base to own and owe; to live and feel
"Great in wrong-doing only; rich, in debt;
"King of a throne not thine but stolen, set
"High on crushed hearts whose sorrow is thy weal.
"This is not thine, and that is also not;
"No, naught is Bharata's; Bharata, naught is thine,
"All this is Rama's." Such did he divine
To be the sense of lurking whispers got
From every breeze, from music, from each spot
In court or hall or where he drove or walked,
Ever the same reproach upon the air
Within his ear, and in his sight the fair
Disdainful form of Rama. Silent stalked
That proud reproachful figure 'fore his eyes,
Till he no more could bear it, but his throne
And court relinquished, with one friend alone,

To search for Rama 'neath the southern skies.
That friend Jabáli was, who knew the way,
And aided him, that Rama now might rule.
But the queen wept with anger, crying "fool,"
And hid herself despairing.
From that day
When Rama led the princess from their home,
Murmuring, "We are banished," and her eyes
Brightened with love beneath their dark surprise
And Sita answered, "Lord, whate'er shall come
"From this distress, so be it envy's scope
"Shall part us not, no lesser pain will grieve,"
Since then the banished pair had sought to weave
A nest-like home built out of straws of hope
On love's foundation. In a barbarous land
They lived a life of cruel banishment
And often northward longing glances sent
But southward came no word nor helping hand.
God never made for man a nobler wife
Than Sita was, whose soul controlled her love
And led it heaven-ward, till it rose above
The fogs of gloom and gave a light to life
That overshone the darkened paths of fate.
For, knowing fate adverse is hard to bear
And grieving makes it harder, all her care
Forgetting self was busied with her mate.
To lighten his heart, whom sorrow pressed to earth,
She schooled her own to a gentle gaiety
That was itself a kind of piety,
For love's sweet sake converting grief to mirth.

Naught did she for herself alone, but gave
Herself, her thoughts, and all the best of her
To him she loved, a queenly woman, ne'er
Dethroned by woe, who misery made her slave
To laugh for him. For him she mocked distress;
For him she hid her tears within her heart,
Till with her smile she chased his frown apart,
Veiling with love despair and wretchedness.
They say that she was beautiful, so fair
That lovelier form was ne'er by mortals seen,
That on the earth none like her e'er has been
And few in heaven, and yet her features rare
Were unto her but as a fitting dress
To clothe a subtler beauty rarer still
Of tender love and strong courageous will,
Which, from within, her earthly loveliness
Illumed with heavenly light.
So lived this pair
Deep in the forest, hid for nigh a year,
At home with danger, need, and every fear.
The lion's cave, the tiger's covered lair
Became familiar horrors; fruit, their meat;
Water, their wine; and time a tedious space
To wander through; the world, a weary place;
When Bharat came and found their poor retreat
Sooner than hoped, for, spread without delay
The secret news, which swift as serpent glides
The jungle through and what today betides
Reveals at morn to tribesmen far away,
Had reached the north, by savage tongues conveyed

To wise Jabáli, who could understand
Their barbarous speech and knew to oil the hand
Of those whose knowledge needed to be paid.
"O lost and searched afar and happily found,"
Cried Bharata, "Come now and ease my pain.
"Return with us; dear brother, be again
"The king thou art; forsake this hermit ground."
Then Rama spoke the wonder that he thought:
"Banished am I; and shall a hermit rule?
"Keep thou the scepter, thou the crown and stool
"Of kingship still. Our father's words are fraught
"With heavier meaning now than when he stood
"Lord of his acts and mine. His words were meant
"To hold me fast in bitter banishment
"For fourteen years; nor even if he would,
"Could he release me till the time was passed,
"And what he swore, fulfilled. 'Tis but for naught
"Thy journey has been made. When fully wrought
"The chain of years shall be and we at last
"Retrace our steps, then if perchance thou still
"So generous art and in thy brother's stead
"Art reigning, give me welcome and I, the dead
"Having thus honored, shall obey thy will."
But grieved was Bharata and turned around
T' enlist Jabáli's aid, his councillor,
Wily and sage, a priest indeed, but more
Evil than good he knew, who now, astound
At Rama's word, said: "O too pious king,
"Hear me, who have been priest within thy court
"Longer than thou hast lived. Do oaths import

"More than a kingdom does? What folly to bring
"Thy father's vow against us! Know'st thou not
"That with his dying died whate'er he said?
"What! Wilt thou let mere ashes, cold and dead,
"Disfigure life? Oaths are but words forgot
"For greater gain; they cast no magic spell.
"Lighter than dust upon the windy earth,
"What weighs an oath? What's any promise worth,
"When he that holds the promise cannot tell
"If it be kept? The ghost whereof we speak
"Has no more power than has the sacrifice,
"Which threatens hell or proffers heavenly bliss
"To coward souls whom fear has rendered weak.
"Believe thy priest; he knows what moves the priest,
"As only snakes the legs of snakes can see;
"And of these priestly matters let me be
"The arbiter. Fear not a man deceased
"And oaths of ghosts. Thy chance of glory now
"Waits thee; then seize it bravely. Dread may fret
"A vulgar spirit, not thine. All else forget,
"But ne'er forget thyself. The king art thou.
"Because Himálaya was obscured by cloud,
"What fool would say Himálaya is no more?
"Thy glory hid was neither lost, nor bowed
"To lower rank. All hail, thou king of Oude!"
Said Rama: "O Jabáli, my raw youth
"Of scarce seventeen thy ripened seventy years
"Of age and priestly sanctity reveres.
"Little I know, but know to speak the truth.
"For even the gods, 'tis said (though sometimes wrong

"Their acts appear, as when their lightnings strike
"Innocent men, or wealth and fame requite
"An evil doer, as if no god were strong
"To care or punish), still untruth eschew.
" '*One rule of virtue even the gods obey,*
" '*To speak the truth and keep an oath alway,*'
"The Vedas say, and '*Heaven on what is true*
" '*Alone depends, so all untruth is sin.*'
"Now this I cannot argue, for thy wit
"Abases mine, but I must cling to it,
"Since all I know of virtue lies within
"This Aryan rule and I am Aryan bred.
"My father swore an oath for me, his slave,
"To keep for him, and I my promise gave.
"Urge me no more, Jabáli; all is said.
"I cannot go with honor; hence I stay
"Till all the slow-paced years at last are gone.
"Then, if my brother wills (for from now on
"Who else is ruler?), thou mayst rest upon
"My word, I will return."
Thus Rama spoke,
And silent sat Jabáli. Then uprose
Bharat and speaking sadly said, "Who knows
"If truth is always right or virtue's yoke
"Merely oppresses? But my lord has spoken.
"I will not irk him further. Bare thy feet
"For me, thy viceroy, brother, if 'tis meet
"That I thy office take, and as a token
"Thy sandals on my head, that men may know
"Rama is king and Bharat but his slave,

"I evermore will wear." So Rama gave
His sandals for a symbol plain, to show,
As Bharat wished, that Bharat was not king,
And from that time, with Rama's sandals crowned
Bharat held court at Oude, until the round
Of years was past, whereof the minstrels sing.

For in this chronicle of ancient days
The part left out exceeds the portion told,
And Rama, after Bharat left, enrolled
A mighty host, abandoned hermit ways,
And sweeping further south, on vengeance bent,
A fiery comet blazing mid mild stars,
Inflamed the land with a red trail of wars,
Till Ravan fell. Then with his death content,
Who her had stolen, Rama led his wife
Back to the north and lived in lasting peace.
But who his battles listed would not cease
Telling the endless story of that strife
From crescent moon until its gibbous back
Showed bent and laboring. Yet of Sita's fate
And what she suffered, briefly to relate
Will strain no patient ear.
Amid the wrack
Of foundered years that filled their hermitage,
Rama had naught to do but gather fruit
From laden trees, or idly watch the route
Taken by deer, or in slow talk engage
With Sita, as she spoke with glowing look
Of happiness to come and filled his soul

With patient bravery. Now once there stole
Upon them, talking thus beside a brook
Ere eve, a sight so strange that silence fell
Between them and with startled curious eyes
They gazed a moment breathless with surprise
Upon the marvel, for a slim gazelle
Before them on the forest pathway stood
And all its form gleamed sparkling as with gold,
So bright a radiance did its limbs enfold,
And like a statue against the shadowed wood
Its beauty shone.
Upstarted Rama then,
Pensive no longer, but with quick delight
Rousing his heart to see anear a sight
So wonderful, "Wait till I come again,"
He cried to Sita, as the frightened deer
Leaped down the path, escape in flight to find,
And he in haste pursued that golden hind.
"Wait till I come," who never would appear
Again before her in that hermit gown
Nor in that lonely place. For as he sped
After the deer, which as by magic fled,
And Sita waited, evening, dropping down
Like a black cloud, came swiftly. Gone the sun;
'Neath sudden stars a gloom of shadows lay
Already round her; night succeeded day
With instantaneous darkness. One by one
She heard and hearing feared the awesome sounds
Of prowling beasts, alert to maim and kill,
The piercing shrieks of victims struck and still

Alive, to vent the agony of their wounds,
The voice of nature feeding on itself
In everlasting torture. As in dread
Sita so sate and listened, o'er her head
Loomed a faint light, such as a forest elf
(Where elves like fireflies glow and fade anon)
Makes, running o'er low marshes, but this fire
Was that of eyes grown lurid with desire,
And faded not, then, ere her heart had gone
Three beats, from out the darkness stretched an arm
Which held her fast, while on her gasping mouth
A hairy hand was laid and to the south
The monster flew, nor did her bodily harm
Save that the anguished beating of her heart
Bedimmed her mind and like to one in death
She lay deprived of reason and of breath
Till, after long exhaustion, with a start
She woke to find she was a prisoner
Mured behind scaleless walls and at her side
Foul hags, who greeted her as "Ravan's bride."
Then horror chilled her heart and death to her
Seemed kinder fate than life, for well she knew
Of Ravana, the ravisher and fiend
Invulnerable, and little hope she gleaned
From what she knew, but this at least, in lieu
Of hope she had, that Ravan for base crime
Against a woman, of vile acts the worst,
Had once, if he again should sin, been cursed
To suffer death. Thus for all future time
Only a willing woman might he hold

Safely in love's embrace. That thought she kept
As talisman, and on it nightly slept
And waked therewith, for many months, cajoled,
Threatened, and hurt, in vain. "Be Ravan's queen,"
His satellites cried, "Yield, and the world is thine";
Or yet again, "Swift punishment condign
"Will make thee pliant. No spirit e'er has been
"Sufficient strong imperious Ravan's will
"To long withstand; 'twill crush thee to the earth."
Or binding her with fetters in lewd mirth
They sought to cow her, frail but dauntless still.
But after many moons had lit the sky
And every dolorous day and eve had passed
As fruitless of his purpose as the last,
And she repeated ever, "Let me die,
"But never ask me this," a rumor, brought
By Ravan's spies ran southward, "Rama comes";
Then blare of trumpets and loud roll of drums,
And armored hosts, whom Rama's self had taught.
For Rama, maddened when he found her not
At his return and vainly searched the nook
Which hid their hermitage and wood nor brook
Revealed her dead or living, but at one spot
A bangle of hers upon the southern road
Had hinted at her capture, quickly drew
Around him a rough force, a forest crew
Of fiercely chattering creatures, whose abode
Within the southern jungle Ravan's spite
Had oft invaded. These had Rama gained
With ease to succor him and shortly trained

In war's rude discipline. But of that fight
Which Ravan waged upon his borderland,
Let who will talk; enough that there he fell
Where Rama smiting sent his soul to hell
And left him headless mid his routed band
Of fleeing savages. For God had said,
"Invulnerable let him be, yet not
"Entirely so, as gods are," and one spot
Left open for death to enter on his head,
And Rama found that spot; but slaying him came
Still wroth to Sita's tent and fetched her out
Rudely and cried, "Sita, I would not doubt,
"But others do; and where is doubt is shame
"For thee and me. No husband can endure
"Such dark suspicion as upon thee lies.
"His captive thou, but was his enterprise
"For glory only? Art thou still the pure
"Unsullied wife that left me or have arms
"Other than mine embraced thee? This they ask,
"And thine, ere Rama takes thee back, the task
"To prove thy innocence."
Not all the harms
That lust, starvation, torture, solitude
And Ravan's hags inflicted hurt so much
As this. Affrighted, shrinking from his touch,
Incredulous she stood; but then, endued
With courage born of conscious purity,
Holding bruised hands aloft, she cried, "My Lord,
"True have I been, faithful, and kept the word
"Pledged at the stone before the holy three,

"The god of fire, yon heaven, and that pure star
"Whose eye first watched us on our wedding-night
"When I my love for all my life did plight
"To thee and thou to me. As heaven afar
"Looks on me now, as Fire, the god of truth
"And purity, is a witness, as the eye
"Of that great star beholds us still, so I
"Am no less thine alone than when in youth
"I made that promise; body and soul am thine
"And have been always." But as Rama stood
Irresolute and hesitant, piled she wood
And made a fire and cried: "O thou divine
"Witness of truth, god Fire, hear thou my prayer:
"If I in thought and word and deed have been
"Faithful to Rama ever, if between
"Us twain lies nothing hid, when to thy care
"I here commit my body and that good name
"Once held in honor, now by men misused,
"Bear witness for me, falsely here accused
"Of being false, and save me from thy flame."
So she invoked the god and without pause
With burning heart entered the burning fire
And fearless stood, upon that deadly pyre
Staking her life. The god espoused her cause.
Back fell the flames that circled her about,
Unharmed her feet, as trod they cooling sands,
Upon her breast unscathed her little hands
Rested unharmed. Then proudly came she out
And vindicated stood her lord beside.
"The god has spoken, Rama," Sita said.

But now abashed before her, with bowed head,
"I never doubted, O my love," he cried.
Then Sita smiled in sadness, whose own love
Unquestioning, had never in the past
A tittle of doubt upon its object cast,
Or sought its worth before the world to prove,
Yet, when her lord asked, "Bearest thou ill will
"Because of this which I have done—and rue?"
Knowing his love though faulty yet was true,
She answered, "Be not grieved; I love thee still."

This the one blot, that he distrusted her,
On Rama; but war's wrath his soul had riven;
For long the fight and wearily had he striven,
And battle's rage man's godlike character
Strips off, to leave him human.
So they came
Homeward and Rama took again his own.
But Sita sat beside him on his throne
And shares with Rama Rama's deathless fame.

MUCUKUNDA

Oft I ponder, as I wander through the fogs of ancient thought,
On the death-defying wonder which the gods of fire and thunder
Once on Mucukunda wrought.
From the golden night of olden time, when earth embraced the sky,
Men with gods like features wearing, gods with men like passions sharing,
Hither comes that sage's cry.
Knowledge gleaning, wisdom's meaning sought he while he lived his span.
Spirits above in heaven upstayed him, spirits below on earth obeyed him,
Wiser than the gods, but man.
Yet he languished with an anguished soul consumed by deathless fire;
For he thought: "Man's lot is grieving, toiling, hoping, still believing
"In the good of mad desire.
"But what quiet as life's riot passes, comes when heaven we gain?
"There the gods with chariots rattling live a life of greed and battling;
"Joys of earth and heaven are vain.
"Here confusion, there illusion. Would that life's unease might cease.

"What is life? A day of sorrow. What is death? A worse tomorrow.
"All I crave is sleep and peace.
"O my nation, iteration of dead hopes unsatisfied,
"Glad were I to leave thee, sweetly sunk in revery, and completely
"Lost to things that man betide."
Then he, turning from men, yearning for peace only, stilled his soul,
Till that great sage and magician, inward by his own volition
Looking, came anear his goal.
Yet not wholly, for earth solely vanished, but his senses still
Knew the strife of fiends designing, felt the might of gods declining
In the war of good and ill.
For the wailing of gods, quailing 'fore the demons, rent the air
And he heard them shouting, "Save us! Weak are we; the demons brave us;
"Save thy gods from their despair.
"Virtue hast thou, wisdom hast thou. Lost have these the ancient gods.
"Bring thy skill; thy virtue lend us. Heavenly arms no more defend us.
"Help us in these awful odds."
Gods disdaining, but refraining from the taunt he harbored long,

Since they struggled, though supinely, with all evil and divinely
Fought for right against the wrong,
Sadly rose he then, to close the opening door of peace and strive
By the strength of man's endeavor, by the virtue gods had never
Given, against the demons' hive.
Long the mournful sage, though scornful of the gods, but not of good,
With the thoughts his mind projected still those weakling gods protected,
And the hosts of hell withstood,
Till defeated they retreated, whom the sage with gods had felled,
And the gods cried, "Now requited be thou, for all evil, blighted
"By thy wisdom, here is quelled.
"We, the weaker, man, the seeker, envy for his sense controlled;
"Since his knowledge, keener, surer, glances with a radiance purer,
"As the sword of heaven grows cold.
"Man is growing; gods are going; yet we elemental lords
"Still have power a gift to proffer. Any boon thou willst we offer.
"Choose what with thy wish accords."
All things deeming, save the dreaming of his slumber, full of pain,

Mucukunda answered, "Dreary is the life of gods and weary
"Am I, let me sleep again.
"What the measure of gods' pleasure, what the bliss of life divine?
"Strife and tumult, war undying—can for such a life my sighing
"Soul its peace, half-won, resign?
"And sad-hearted the departed sons of earth, when life is o'er;
"Not to these my wish turns. Grant me, gods, deep slumber; yea, enchant me,
"That I rest, to wake no more.
"Ye have waked me, ye have raked me, living coal, from ashlike sleep;
"Dim that light again and slowly let my spirit sink, but lowly
"Glow and still life's embers keep."
Then the immortals closed the portals of his spirit and lo! he slept.
"Safe we hold thee in our keeping. Death be his who wakes thee sleeping,"
So they spoke. Their watch was kept
Through long ages, while the sage's guardians screened the sacred spot
Where he slept his night of dreaming, nothing knowing, nothing seeming,
Far from heaven, by earth forgot.
Thus he slumbered through unnumbered cycles till the One God came,

The Ineffable, the lawful heir of all the gods, the awful
God of the unuttered name.
HE, perceiving that deceiving spells of old must surely break,
Sent his slave to rouse the sleeper: "Kalayavan, thou swift Leaper,
"Wake him, for his spirit's sake."
Quick the cunning Leaper, running, glided raylike, grazed the earth,
Touched the sage with wand extended, whispered, "Wake, the old is ended.
"Come to new and higher birth."
Scarce that spoken word had broken Heaven's antique and binding spell,
When the Curse of gods in anger smote that herald's limbs with languor.
Dead on earth the Leaper fell.
But, appearing, spoke with cheering words of comfort God, the One:
"Sloth and dreaming treading under, cut thy soul and sleep asunder.
"Wake, for lo! the night is done.
"Now the failing, weak and paling star-gods hide their fading light.
"Wake! The ancient age is ending. Wake! For a fresh dawn is sending
"Dazzling rays athwart the night.
"Now the vastness of night's fastness opens as the day is born.

"Wake and see the never-dying light that darkness underlying
"Brings at last diviner morn.
"I, the One God, I, the sun-god of this glorious day have come;
"Mine I make the habitation of old gods; their lost creation
"Mocks them and their voice is dumb.
"But some power until this hour waits upon their dying pride,
"And the messenger that found thee, breaking through the spell that bound thee,
"Falls thus shriveled at thy side.
"So still fearful are the tearful faces of the gods dethroned,
"Now but fleeting specters, dimly peering, now as giants grimly
"Angered, seeking what they owned.
"Let them mutter; let them utter curses, till their strength decay;
"For the soul of man no longer shall be fettered by them; stronger
"Gods than these have passed away.
"Hear the only God, whose lonely being, sealike, holds mankind.
"I, the ocean of life, am calling to earth's spirit-streams, which falling
"In me source and ending find."

"All is altered," the sage faltered, "purblind eyes I open still.
"What is God to me? A brother of the Thunderer, or some other
"Vain opponent of life's ill?
"Is contending without ending still the aimless aim of life?
"Have the eyes of men grown clearer? Is there aught in life that dearer
"Seems than peace, the end of strife?"
"Good betide thee, sage," replied He, "blinded still thine eyes indeed.
"Wake, thy sight from darkness freeing; peace is not the aim of being.
"Strife is spirit's vital seed.
"In each haunted soul is planted strife, the seed of growth and fruit,
"Strife, which leads man to aspire up and on, still climbing higher
"Godward. Not as strives the brute,
"On one level, deeming evil what opposes greed and lust,
"Not the strife for gain or power, but the strife against the lower.
"Even I, the All-god, must
"Strive forever. Life is never peace. I toil, and so must thou.
"Dream not of a peaceful heaven. Think not sin can be forgiven.
"Sin is weakness. Man is now

"Not a creature, but by nature one with God and
with Him strives,
"God, who rests not, but still working lives, nor,
stone-like, labor shirking,
"Stands apart from other lives.
"Seek not stillness. Peace is illness. Strife in life can
never cease.
"Death ensues whenever striving ends. Things sense-
less, past all thriving,
"Are the only things at peace.
"As by merit of its spirit striving, beast to man may
rise,
"Though (as well have taught the sages) only after
countless ages,
"So in man the impulse lies
"Not in peaceful sleep and easeful sloth upon the sod
to rest,
"But in vigorous toil and tussle strong to make the
spirit and muscle,
"Bettering still his former best.
"I am life and I am strife and I am God of whom
thou art
"In thy spirit's constant motion but a wave upon
life's ocean.
"Take, O man, in God thy part.
"As the waters, ocean's daughters, swell the sea they
never fill,
"For the ocean's self, ascending rises, a pure stream
unending,
"Which the fires of heaven distil,

"So improvement is life's movement upward, ever rarified,
"Till, exempt from the material, in existence pure, ethereal,
"God and men alike abide.
"Banish terror. Shun the error blasting still thy country's sod.
"Life is struggling up and forward. He who shirks it is a coward,
"False to man and false to God."

GANGES

There lived of yore a maid divine, a daughter of the sky,
And all the gods rejoiced in her whenever she passed by.
Her skin was white as ocean's pearl, her robe like ocean's foam,
Her feet like running waters ran and much they loved to roam.
Like shining water gleamed her form, her laugh was like a rill;
She was so happy in her heart she never could be still.
Leaping o'er the clouds she went, outracing Indra's cars,
And twinkling danced her flashing feet amid the rolling stars.
Rushing like a foamy wave, lighter than the wind,
All her fleecy draperies left the breeze behind.
Thus she wandered ever, morn and evening late,
When the sun was rising, when the sun went down,
When the sun was resting on midday's highest crown,
And Ganges they called her for ganging fair her gait.
Now sorrow she had never known, and ne'er had heard of woe;

So joyous in the clouds she lived she seldom glanced
below;
And busied ever as she was with running to and fro
She had no time for other things, but all her life was
play.
She had to toss the clouds about, to sing and greet
the day,
And chase the little wandering stars that always got
away.

But once upon a morning, what time the sea was dry,
When all the earth was parching and death to man
was nigh,
There came the maid rejoicing because the night was
o'er,
And all at once she found herself before the heavenly
door—
The threshold of heaven that rests in upper
air—
And paused a moment on the sill, for pleasant was
it there
To gaze afar from heaven's high gate and know how
glad she felt.
About her knees she drew her robe and fastened
close her belt;
She grasped the gateposts with each hand and leaned
far out,
And all her mass of yellow hair her shoulders fell
about.

Then wonder-struck was she to mark the grieved and
weeping earth.
Everywhere she sorrow saw; she heard no sound of
mirth;
But piteous cries from man and child and clamorous
priests at prayer,
Only lamentations loud and echoes of despair.

As Ganges looked, the joyousness slow faded
from her face,
The dancing light that loved her eyes fled to
another place,
And for the first time in her life she felt no
longer glad;
She became sorrowful; Ganges was sad.

Then all the gods, who missed her and needed her
and sighed,
Went hunting round for Ganges, looking far and
wide.
Everywhere they searched for her, till hunting helped
no more,
When coming up behind her they found her at the
door.
Coming up they called to her: "Oh, wherefore hast
thou fled?"
Happily their hearts beat to see her golden head;
Happily their hearts beat, but when they came anigh,
Ganges turned and looked at them and a tear was in
her eye.

"Ganges, O Ganges, what mist hath wet thine eyes?
"Has a little cloud of grief ascended to the skies?
"Turn thy face from earth, dear, turn thy head and smile.
"We from thee have hid the truth but ah, so short a while!
"Life is linked with suffering. The truth at last we own,
"Which all the gods concealed from thee. We would not make it known,
"For thou hast been the last to live the life we lived of old,
"When all the gods were void of care and never a heart grew cold.
"Alack, that even thou must learn the secret gods have kept.
"Ganges is sorrowful; Ganges hath wept.
"Alas for joyful Ganges, that e'er she looked below,
"To lose the laughter of her eyes and find the tear of woe!"

Ganges, merry Ganges, the gods in silence heard.
Soberly, with questing eyes, earth's tale from them she lured.
For when they saw her anguish would not be turned aside,

They showed her how the rivers deep and
ocean's self had dried.
"The earth," they said, "has thirsted long and
hungered many a year.
"Agastya,* heaven's most burning world, hath
dried the sterile meer.
" 'Tis from the ocean comes the rain, without
their rain they die;
"And this is why poor mortals weep, reproach-
ful of the sky.
"But we, the gods, can help them not, we can
but grieve for man;
"For Fate hath said (and Fate the gods hath
ruled since life began)
"That till a god this heaven shall leave and life
for man give up,
"Unfilled forever will remain vast ocean's empty
cup.
"But we are the undying gods, and mortals,
soon or late,
"Through thirsting or through other means,
must meet a mortal's fate.
"Then if they perish the sooner because they
lose the sea,
"Why should a god for them that die lose im-
mortality?
"For he that dies to save them, shall turn into a
stream,

* Canopus. "The stars are large worlds seeming small through great distance" (*Mahabhárata*).

"And flow forever ocean-ward, his life at best a dream.

"Ganges, Ganges, come now away.

"Forget the grief of mortals. See, it is the day;

"High and bright the sunbeams sparkle through the sky.

"Come and dance before us. What if men must die?

"Wonderful the morning, brilliant shines the sun;

"Wander, oh, wander with us till day be done.

"Come with us and hunt the stars that vanish all day long.

"Willst thou not smile on us? Hast thou no song?

"Ganges, O Ganges, sorrow not for men.

"Wherefore should a goddess weep? Laugh for us again."

But from the face of Ganges the gods could win no smile.

She only shook her yellow curls and thought a long while.

A long while she pondered, a long while she thought;

She spoke unto her heart alone and listed what it taught.

Then all the gods went softly, moving slow about;

Grieving they looked at her but did not dare to speak;
For sorrowful was Ganges and heaven its light went out.
Ganges went as one who sought but knew not where to seek;
Quietly, sadly, here and there she went,
From her eyes the joyance gone, her gladness spent.

In the troubled evening, Ganges, pale and wan,
To the door of heaven came back, whence she had gone;
Wistfully downward gazed she o'er the earth.
There she saw the sons of men lamenting death and birth.
Round the useless altars, lit with faith's pure fire,
Prayed men to the mighty gods, distraught with one desire,
Asking for the only boon that not a god would give,
Calling to unhearing ears and begging but to live.
All the night she watched them and could not go away,
Watched them and wept for them and waited for the day.

When the day appearing gilded heaven's high lands,
Ganges to her forehead fair pressed her pointed hands,
With her fingers at her brow came the goddess tall
To the Great Father, who ruleth over all.
Down she bowed before him in her garment white,
Adoring and silent she owned the Father's might.
Gently he spoke to her, "Blessèd be thou,"
Gently he raised her up and kissed her on the brow.
"Ganges, O Ganges, spirit of happiness,
"Weep not before me; soothed be thy distress.
"Wilt thou a boon of me? Any boon is thine,
"If only thou wilt laugh for me and smile, O child divine."

Then to Ganges' saddened eyes came a smile once more.
Gaily too she sought to laugh, light-hearted as before.
Looking up she smiled for him, as had she not a care,
While like happy sunbeams danced her tresses fair.
With a smile upon her lips, melodious and low
Spoke she as she bowed her head; soft her words and slow:
"Father, O Father, grief hath grasped my heart.
"How can Ganges laugh for thee, gracious though thou art?
"Nevertheless I smile for thee, thee the All-wise,
"Begging for the boon I crave, with death before my eyes.
"Father, Great Father, this the boon I ask,

"Let me take upon myself the Fate-appointed task.
"I have seen the grief of earth, I have grieved for men.
"Let me now renounce my life, that man may live again."

Before the soul of Ganges the Father bent his head
Revering her, and tenderly unto her he said:
"This indeed hath Fate declared the moment thou wast born:
" 'She shall be with glory girt more radiant than the morn.
" 'She shall purest gladness find, bliss without alloy,
" 'She of all the heavenly gods shall know the truest joy.'
"Ganges, O Ganges, be it as thou say'st,
"Take thy bliss surpassing heaven, the boon for which thou pray'st."

Ganges, fair Ganges, stood at heaven's high door.
She looked around on all the scenes she was to see no more;
But in her face no sadness showed, her sorrow was at rest,
She felt a wonder of great joy that flooded all her breast.

She gazed upon the earth below, into the distance deep,
There was no fear within her heart to take that deadly leap;
But she loosed her flowing garment and she clasped her hands on high,
And straight before the tearful gods sprang headlong from the sky.

Then beside their lofty portal shuddering stood each awed immortal,
Rooted fast in anxious terror and the dread of what should be,
As they saw the child of gladness for the cure of human sadness
Leave her life of joy behind her and fall dying in the sea.
And they watched her plunging, gleaming
Far below them, swift, and seeming
Like a bird of magic whiteness
Glittering earthward, till her brightness
Shone like a dissolving cloud,
Misty, down the depth appalling.
Then did all the gods together closer round the portal crowd,
Looking aghast from heaven's high threshold, fearful of a whispered word,
Till they heard
Floating up the sound of falling
Water, like a sweet voice calling,

And they said, "It is the laughter
"Of our child, which ever after
"Shall proclaim her as the happiest, aye, the best;
"Who has perished, and is blest."
Then they saw her as a river
Clothed in spray, the foam-flakes ever
Wrapping close her form descending,
And they murmured, " 'Tis the ending,
"She is dying, she is shrouded, 'tis her cerement white as air."
And they saw what, mid that crashing
Rush of waves, seemed sunlight flashing,
And they whispered, " 'Tis our darling's shining hair."

But below men stood half frighted,
Watching a great stream that lighted
All the earth with brightness, ever
Flowing, a majestic river,
Sparkling in tumultuous motion,
Gliding down to fill the ocean
And to rescue man from death.
On it speeded. Beauty caught it
As the earth bowed down and brought it,
Radiant, dazzling him that saw it, till the gazer held his breath,
Lest he lose the sight and glory
Of that wonder; while the hoary

Priests of earth upraised their faces, glistening
with the tears of joy.
Then the mother kissed her boy
And the husband clasped his wife,
And the hearts of men enraptured praised the
gods, who give us life.

Thus she leaped, the immortal goddess, thus she left
her home above;
Leaped to earth to show to mortals how a heart
divine may love.
Rolling on flows Ganges ever from the abode of gods
on high,
Never-ending streams of blessing, bringing from the
upper sky.
Where ye see the sky-upholding peaks Himálayan,
thence she sprang;
There with that great leap of waters first the mount's
deep caverns rang.
Then, descending, came she southward on her path-
way to the meer,
Where ye now, as erst your fathers, still behold these
joyous, clear,
Dancing billows, rushing seaward. This is she, the
stream divine;
Holy is she, holy is she; heaven-illumed her waters
shine,
Fairer than the pearls of ocean, pure to cleanse from
soil and sin.

They that err, let them approach her sacred waves
and bathe therein.
Touch we e'en her goddess-garment, lo! our souls
are purified,
And all sins shall be forgiven him that bathes in
Ganges' tide.

ARJUNA, THE SILVER KNIGHT

CHARACTERS

BATTLESTRONG, *Emperor of India, head of the House of Pandus.*

BHIMA, *the Fearful, the gigantic and brutal brother of the Emperor.*

ARJUNA, *the Silver Knight, younger brother of Battlestrong and Bhima.*

THE TWINS, *the youngest brothers of the Pandu clan.*

THRONHELD, *king of Hastina, uncle of the Pandus, Head of the House of Kurus.*

THE INVINCIBLE, *Crown-Prince of Hastina.*

HARDHEART, *younger brother of Invincible.*

SAKUN, *the Hawk, uncle of Invincible.*

DRUPADA, *king of Panchala, foe of the Kurus.*

KRIS, *king of Dwaraka (the Town-of-Gates), special friend of Arjuna.*

ASWATTHÁM, *The Horseman, a Kuru Leader (army general).*

BHISHMA, DRONA, KARNA, SALYA, *former Kuru Leaders.*

KRISHNA *(the Dark) or Draupadi, daughter of Drupada.*

SUBHADRA, *the Beautiful, sister of Kris.*

PRITHA, *queen-mother of the Pandus.*

GANDHARI *(the woman of Kandahar), queen-mother of the Kurus.*

THE CAUSE OF STRIFE

What caused the strife, which ceased when Battle-
strong
Avenged at last the ignominious wrong
Done to the Pandus by the House of Kur
And through the gates of cowering Hastipur
Marched undisputed conqueror? At his side
Arjun, the Silver Knight, the Pandus' Pride,
Walked, kinglier than the king, while Bhima there
Fierce and gigantic strode; behind, the pair
Of younger brothers followed, who, the name
Of Pandu bearing, shared the Pandus' fame,
Though adding naught to it. These the Pandus Five
That had through many a peril come alive
From Thronheld's hands, their uncle, who the throne
His brother left had seized and for his own
Base son, th' Invincible, held. But at his court
The fatherless Pandus lived, as ships in port,
When storm-tossed, anchor. Heirs of Hastin, they,
But forced as boys their uncle to obey,
Who, though he longed to slay the Pandus, yet
Dared not, through all too flagrant action, set
The people's wrath against his dire intent,
And so conceived the dastard crime, which meant,
At Fate's command, of all his hopes the end.
That day, long since, as speaks a kindly friend,
Said Thronheld to his nephews, Arjuna,
Bhima, and Battlestrong: "At Varana,
"Two leagues away, a feast the people make

"With joyous revelry; there, for your sake,
"Have I prepared a welcome and a house
"For you young men to stay in. Go, carouse
"With others of your age, enjoy your youth;
"Take the Twins with you. 'Tis not well, in sooth,
"For lads to walk forever in such state
"As royal life demands, or profligate
"To be in secret. Join their harmless sport.
"Doffing the stiff demeanor of the court,
"Forget that ye are princes; spend a day
"In simple pastime, sleep the night away,
"And so return to Hastin." With good will
The Pandus went and sported there, until
They woke at midnight, in that house prepared,
With flames about and unto death had fared,
(For pitch and resin lined the walls of lac
And guards at every exit beat them back),
Had not they quickly through Fate's guidance found
A cave beneath and passing underground
Into the jungle's web of tree and vine,
Escaped the guards, whom Thronheld's vile design
Had stationed to destroy them. These returned
To Hastin, when the house of lac had burned,
And with pretended tears their story gave,
How the five Pandus in one common grave
Of flame had perished. So the city grieved,
Since many loved the Pandus; but, relieved
Of them he hated, Thronheld made his show
Of bitter grief and loud funereal woe.

Then, outcasts, fearful, grown in caution wise,

The Pandu princes donned a mean disguise
And lying hidden in a distant town
With Pritha, their queen-mother, settled down
To live as beggars on a daily dole,
While Fate their doubtful spirits to the goal
Unknown directed and their youthful strength
Nourished at every step, until at length
Upon the head deserving gleamed the crown
And fame undying clothed the Pandus' town.*

* Indrapat (Indra's plain), built by the Pandus, now in ruins on the outskirts of Delhi, its modern successor.

In concealment dwelt the outlaws, garbed as priests.
Their hopes had fled.
Counting seasons lived they, homeless, as forever life
were dead,
Till, as if from long enchantment loosened, one,
awaking, spoke.
God-inspired and urging action, Arjun's lips their
stupor broke:
"Hope remains while life still lingers. Rise, my
brothers, for today,
"Robbed of all, we still have courage. Shall we fling
our lives away?
"Fame and fortune follow valor. Slain or slaughter-
ing, it is well
"Storming heaven to sit with Indra high above the
cowards' hell.
"War is good, yet waiting battle other aims a man
may move.
"Fame and love as in a vision (came it from the gods
above?)
"Has my heart beheld, a maid whom I pursued and
caught at last,
"Dreaming dreams that in the dreaming seemed the
future and the past.
"Then I heard the Kurus shouting round about, and
in my heart
"Something whispered, 'In Panchala, Drupad's
home; arise, depart.'

"Brothers, will ye forth and aid me, fearing not what there befall,
"Where the maiden and the Kuru on our strength and valor call?
"There be they whose arms will gladly help us sow and help us reap.
"Five are we and Drupad loves us. Will ye dare or will ye sleep?"
Not for naught his passion roused them. What they sought they could not say;
But they drove to wide Panchala, glad at heart, and all the way
Seemed to Arjun twice gone over, for his spirit reached the goal
Ere his charger's fleetest gallop neared it, following still his soul.
"Welcome," cried Panchala's monarch, "Well I know what town afar
"Groans beneath a hated sovereign, know what noble blood ye are,
"Ye who outlawed wander homeless, hunted, feared, disconsolate,
"While your treacherous cousins triumph. I as ye the Kurus hate."
Then he feasted them as princes whom the god of guests has brought,
But in vain the looks of Arjun, questioning fate, one object sought,
Till at length in doubtful utterance voiced his tongue his spirit's cry:

"Lived there with thee, now or ever, one whose girlish features vie
"With the fairest maids of Indra? Save in dreams I know her not.
"Lotus eyes has she, mysterious. Long her locks and glad the spot
"Where her feet dance, ringing music from the anklets' silver bells,
"Slender-waisted, jasmine-bosomed; is it truth my vision tells?
"Spirits have whispered, 'in Panchala.' King, I beg this single grace.
"Let the heart love speeded hither look not vainly for that face."
"In Panchala," answered Drupad, smiling his amused surprise,
"There are fifty thousand maidens and they all have lotus eyes,
"Slender waists, and hair, and anklets. Does the maiden of thy dream
"By some token still unspoken different to the others seem?"
"I should know her if I saw her; none is like her to my heart,"
Arjun said. "Of all earth's maidens she alone remains apart."
"In with me and view the courtyard," Drupad courteous spoke again,
"Where I music hear. A princess dances there before her train.

"There our maidens watch and praise her feet that, dancing, beat in time
"To the anklets' ringing music, as her bells of silver chime.
"One among them may resemble her thy vision showed, a star
"Shining like a thousand others but distinguished from afar."
Arjun looked and spied the princess, looked and could not turn aside,
Breathless watched her, wondering, thankful, for his heart was satisfied.
Face whose sweetness he remembered kissing through a veil of sleep,
Questioning eyes that guarded secrets loath from him their ward to keep,
Rounded arms that in his vision seemed to beckon, twining still,
As in undulating magic, round his unresisting will.
Music led, melodious motion followed. Arm and foot, a-race,
Weaving strains of measured movement, wrought a web of rhythmic grace;
Slowly swayed her lithesome body bending 'neath the touch of art;
Soft as plashing water sang she, murmuring strains that bathed his heart.
Twinkling clinked her jingling anklets, silver bells light feet above,

Through the screen he saw her dancing, saw her faultless through his love.
Up she glanced, beheld him gazing; forth she fled with all her train.
Then he, raptured but to see her, turned, and met the king again:
"Fair is she above all dreaming. Speak, O monarch, race and name.
"Though I fear to ask, yet tell me, is she free, this nymphlike dame?
"Is she lost to me already, is there hope if still unwon?"
But the monarch cried: "Thy fortune lies within thy hands. The sun
"That tomorrow o'er the expectant homes of this Panchala shines
"Greets her day of husband-choosing, though if love her heart divines,
"Naught has yet betrayed it. Arjun, hark; the maid thy love would own
"Is the princess of Panchala, fairest gem upon my throne.
"Draupadi her name, when flattery Drupad's lineage glorifies,
"Krishna called by those that love her, for the darkness of her eyes."
Answered Arjun: "For this tourney, let him win who meets it best;
"As for me, my love has doubly armed me to withstand the test.

"But 'tis thee I fear. O monarch, can Panchala's haughty throne
"Look with pleasure on a suitor who has but his love alone?"
Laughed aloud the crafty monarch: "Silver Knight, art thou not peer
"Of my race? Though Fate may wrong thee, equal blood is equal dear.
"Try the test and do thy utmost; 'twere not well should I refuse.
"Well thou know'st the ancient usage. Maidens from the heart must choose,
"But since maidens at their Choosing have but awe-directed will,
"From all suitors in the tourney him they choose of knightliest skill.
"Thee I love who hate the Kurus. Welcome art thou, Silver Knight,
"And I pray that heavenly blessings may thy love and skill requite.
"Let no doubt of me disturb thee. If the gods at morning hour
"Grant thee strength to win the maiden, none shall wrest her from thy power."

As the sun against the morrow climbed above Panchala's walls,
Rang the notes of coming revel through the lordly palace halls.

Cheerily the trumpets sounded, many suitors thronged the gate,
Princes, knights, and vain retainers, rolling up in cars of state
From all quarters, drawn together for that jealous joust of arms.
Far renowned was Krishna's beauty, Drupad's wealth enhanced her charms.
Round the arena's oval, mounting, rose the watchers' seats on high,
Tier on tier the curving benches towered against the arching sky.
Many an awning's friendly shadow turned the sun's too eager blaze;
Many a veil's concealing shelter mocked the knights' too ardent gaze;
Men to dare and dames to marvel. Harken! Crash of music loud;
Drums are beating, clear-voiced heralds guide the monarch through the crowd.
With him, clad in jewelled raiment, comes the maiden Draupadi,
Once today, but ne'er hereafter, veilless, for all eyes to see.
Now the hour for winning glory! Come the suitors. Side by side
Thundered down the long arena every warrior in his pride,
On, like one broad wave together, even-handed, car to car,

Breast to breast, as if one axle held their sixty wheels
of war.
Down they swept where king and Pandus (guests
whose seats were next the king)
Waited for the voice of trumpet name and rank of
each to sing.
Save the Pandus, richly harnessed were they all; but
these alone,
Strangers, like spectators only, clad as priests, about
the throne
Sat in silence, hid but watchful, careful not to meet
the eyes
Bent in careless wonder on them. Cunning was their
close disguise.
For the gate swung wide to all men; unto none may
king gainsay
Entrance to the field of glory on a maiden's Choos-
ing Day.
Well they knew that mid the suitors one would be
their deadliest foe;
Never could the Kurus' honor such a test as this
forego.
Well they guessed, for now advancing first, and
claiming foremost place,
Stood the Kurus' prince before them. Sprang the
blood to Arjun's face;
But the king beside him, watching, cried in haste:
"Knights, stand ye here.
"Not today the tourney calls for lance or sword or
charioteer.

"Strange has been the one condition Draupadi has made today;
"Not by combat nor by chariot-race she gives her heart away.
"Stand and hear the words of Clearlight (Krishna's brother well ye know);
"Leave the pomp of four-horse chariot; bare the arm that bends the bow."

Uprose Clearlight, Krishna's brother: "Welcome are ye, princes all;
"Fame ye bring my sister's Choosing; honored is Panchala's hall.
"Here the maiden sits, behold her; listen to her fixed decree.
"She will wed, if he be Aryan, him who, arrows shooting free
"From the great bow I am holding, sends them straight through yonder ring,
"Which ye see revolving slowly, hanging on its golden string;
"Shoots them through the ring revolving, one by one, till five have fled
"To the heart of that far target, in a row, so swiftly sped
"That the last shall reach the target ere the first shall cease to shake,
"Trembling from the mighty impact. Who will first the venture make?"

Wonder held the knights who, listening, laid aside
the useless lance;
Not a word they dared to utter. On the bow they
looked askance.
Saw its length and knew its toughness, reddened at
the target's face,
Measuring swift the dreadful distance, slow to claim
the foremost place.
But at length the vaunting Kurus, hoping still their
skill to show,
One by one their straining sinews bent on that un-
yielding bow.
Then the bow, half bent, recoiling struck and quickly
earthward dashed
Mid the terror of soft laughter. One by one they
crept abashed
Back amid the throng that, hopeless, joyed not their
defeat to see,
Happier deeming shame accomplished than the
dread of shame to be.
For each knew his arm was weaker than the test that
made it quail,
But all knew that to decline were a sadder lot than
fail.
So they met it, one by one, and one by one to mock-
ery came,
Winning at best a silent pity for a dream of noisy
fame.
One by one they toiled, but gaily still the ring re-
volving played

While the target's eye undented each who came more
timorous made.
"Wherefore wait we?" cried impatient one who
brooked no more delay.
From the priestly-clad spectators who is he that
dares to say,
"Shame upon ye, sons of Kuru"? From the mon-
arch's side he ran,
Like a priest his staff and clothing, but his bearing
like a man.
"Shame upon ye, are ye warriors? Back, ye bastards
of a name
"Grander in its faintest echo than your loudest bid
for fame."
Scornful glared the rest, but fury rose to dye the
Kurus' cheek;
Yet the voice of Drupad stayed them: "Let the
priest in folly speak.
"Will a priest instruct in warcraft? Guest is he of
Drupad's throne.
"Much I marvel at his boldness, but I make his
cause my own
"While he dwells a guest and stranger in my home.
Let no man dare
"Lay a hand upon him. Brahman, wilt thou now thy
name declare?
"Wilt thou also, thou, a Brahman, try this test? Then
bend the bow.
"Be thou victor, be thou vanquished, thou shalt
hence uninjured go."

None that kingly word might question. Angered,
sullen, stood they near.
Krishna looked and looking trembled, half from
hope and half from fear.
Arjun smiling bent his head and, as it seemed, pro-
claimed his name,
Speaking unto Drupad softly, then still shrouded,
swiftly came
Unto Clearlight, seized the bow, and, pausing but a
moment long,
Breathing deep, his power drew inward, till his soul
grew calmly strong.
Then, with spanning and with aiming but one mo-
tion, curved the bow.
Strength tremendous hurled and subtlest skill con-
trolled that feathered row.
Deep the bow, the mighty-bosomed, bending bowed
its straining heart,
Never grazing, onward flashing, lightly dashing, dart
on dart,
Leaped they forth, the hissing arrows. Ere the first
had ceased to sound
On the ear, the last behind it shivered in the target's
round.
Through the ring and to the target whizzed the
arrowy row and then
Fell the robe concealing Arjun from the Kurus'
frightened ken,
Him whom they had sought to murder, him they
hoped to see no more,

Arjuna, the Pride of Pandus, closely clad in garb of war!
Back they shrank, the coward-hearted, fear and anger, hate, disgrace
Cowed them in their useless numbers, as they saw his scornful face.
But while still he looked upon them, called a sweet voice, soft and low,
"Finished is the test, O warriors; Krishna's heart is like the bow."
Then the many, questing Drupad, saw the king was well content,
And their shouts of gratulation high to heaven and Arjun sent.
Marvelling much, but more rejoicing that no priest their victor proved,
Thronged the knights to praise the hero, for himself and skill beloved.
Till they opened space before him, where he stood with glowing heart,
Waiting for the maid that chose him now to act her crowning part.
She, descending, veiled her face and came before him. By his side
Knelt she down, as ancient usage bade her kneel, a willing bride,
Bent and kissed his garment's border, rose and, turning, fled again
From the thunder of the trumpets and the envious hearts of men.

KRISHNA

Krishna had been perfected for great love
Through having a heart that unto love made pure
Had been by love unentered till that day.

As one who keeps a chamber clean and warm,
Thinking, "a guest may come," and, when guests
fail,
Watches again, still thinking, "he may come,"

Not knowing whence or wherefore, but some sign,
In finger or ear or where a sign may show,
Has warned and said, "be ready," till the guest

Enters the door at last and cries, "Is all
"Prepared? Art thou a guest-friend?" And the host
Answers, "Long, long prepared; abide with me,"

So was the spotless chamber in her breast
Made fair and ready for a guest unknown,
And when the door was opened, Love came in.

Even as signs had told her, when she played
In the light happiness of preparing hours,
Dancing within the courtyard, to the sound

Of running water and melodious bells,
Or lay at length beneath dark mango trees,
And let her tongue, to the music of her thoughts,

Roam where it would or laugh her mates from sleep,
Even then the sign had spoken, and at the sign,
Midway in talk or laughter, she grew dumb.

Then rang no more her bells a melody;
Then were the mangoes irksome and the maids
Foolish to talk with, but she thought, "O guest,

"Why troublest thou my soul? For if indeed
"Thou vexest when I see thee not and know
"Not who thou art, perchance when thou art come

"Thy coming will but make me sadder still;
"And yet, O guest, do not delay, but come;
"For all my heart is ready, clean, and warm."

So in that yesterday, when Love, the guest
(As from the court she Arjuna beheld)
Came flying to her heart, he entered in.

But she shut to the door and looked upon
Her unknown guest and all the room seemed strange,
Being so brightly lighted that it dazed

Her spirit's eyes, until a soothing cloud
Of tender joy o'erwhelmed her heart with tears,
And many hours she spent alone with Love.

But when her father whispered: "Whom thou sawest
"Will try the test and hist! no Brahman, he,"
And she, now sure that he must win the prize,

Became again more certain he would fail,
While some dread arm she hated slew the guest
And wed her horribly, the sunless night

Of that black thought was as the silent hours
Of one who on the morrow thinks to die,
Unless, but hope is foolish; yet he hopes,

Till suddenly morning breaks and one cries, "Live,"
And what was hope is having, so chanced it her,
When she beheld the whizzing arrows fly,

And some one near her said: "Go, greet thy knight,
"Why sittest thou still idle? It is the law;
"They all are waiting for thee; greet thy knight."

Such words she heard at last and, in the joy
Of Love the guest safe pillowed on her heart,
Approached her knight, then, bowing low her head,

In the supremest hour her girlhood knew,
She kissed his garment's hem, as if it were
The robe of God, and she his worshiper.

THE LOVE-SONG OF KRISHNA

One only love, and that one love is mine.
It fills my soul, and the far realms of space
Are with its light illumed, whose rays divine,
This life transfiguring, all the world embrace.
This is not mine alone, which subtly thrills
My inmost being and, awakening me
To real life, into my heart instils
The chrism of love that floods with ecstasy
My trembling spirit; nay, but mine and more,
The heavenly guest who, entering, me a part
Of a wider life has made, which heretofore
Unknown, unfelt, has surged about my heart,
As were I severed from that poignant flood
Of universal love, untouched, remote,
Who now in spirit and every pulse of blood
Therewith am one, upon whose billows float
The outer things of Being, wealth and fame,
Labor and pastime, all the things that move
Body and brain to action, all a name,
The empty wind that on the sea of love
Frets but its surface. Now my spirit is
One with the world's true being, one with God,
Who is himself all wisdom, truth, and bliss,
The universal being spread abroad
Yet housed in every soul, the door whereto
Stands open for its entrance, knowing love
For what it is, the heavenly guest, the true

Essence of life, all life. Oh, may I prove
Worthy of thee, my love, my life, my all!
When first I saw thee standing still at gaze,
Though yet afar, I heard thy spirit call
To mine; my feet upon untrodden ways
Felt drawn to thee, already flew my soul
To unite itself with thine; I scarce could wait
The tedious hours that held me from my goal,
And shameless loved thee ere the hand of Fate
Me guided to thy side. But now I know
There is no shame in love, but joy and pride,
And God's own happiness. Love's billows flow
Over and through me in resistless tide.
Take me, O love, and make me wholly thine.
Pure is my heart and true and thine alone.
Our love is not of earth but a divine
Power that welds two spirits with its own
And joins us in a holy trinity,
Like Fire and Lightning and the flaming Sun;
Thou shalt be merged in me and I in thee
And Love, the third, will make us three in one.

So Arjun won the bride the Kurus lost,
The Pandus' flight revealing. Day declined;
The Kurus started homeward; twilight crossed
Their darkened way, whose hearts, with hatred blind,
Envy now clouded more. But Battlestrong?
Was he well satisfied to stand aside
Behind his younger brother, whom the throng
Acclaimed, with "Arjun! Arjun wins the bride,"
While he, the eldest, heir of Pandu fame,
Chief of his clan and born to lead the rest,
Walked undistinguished, with unnoticed name,
Feeling a dim dishonor in his breast?
Nay. Yet he walked in wounded pride and said
Naught of that vague displeasure in his heart,
Till, as it were, some god with silent tread
Guided his course and, through a woman's art,
Forced Battlestrong, defending Right, to assert
His primal claim to reverence and to awe,
Though it should do his dearest brother hurt;
Such love had he for gods and Aryan law!
And thus it chanced. For when the herald's call
Had sounded through the arena and in the sight
Of Pandus, now proclaimed, and Kurus all
Krishna had knelt and kissed and claimed her knight,
And when his rivals, though discomfited,
Had smiled with courteous words and duly graced
The triumph by applause and homeward sped,

To hide their hotter anger in hot haste,
When that great day of kingly sport was o'er,
Then Arjun, leading Krishna by the hand,
His aged mother sought. The brothers four,
Gathering round him, made themselves a band
To share the glory only one could earn
And came with him to Pritha, for she went
Not to the test, but waited their return,
In anxious thought o'er widowed memories bent.
They strode together to the sheltered hall
Where Pritha lodged and at the gloomy door
Krishna affrighted paused amid them all,
For, though her heart was brave, she ne'er before
Had looked on Pritha's face and would have fled
In sudden fear, but then, because of love,
She dared whate'er it asked and bent her head
And to the old queen's chamber crept above.
Now, was it a god moved Pritha, lest youth's art
Should draw her son too wholly from her side,
Or was it dread of Battlestrong, whose heart
She knowing feared and would not see defied,
Howe'er it was, as if her mind was still
Upon their life of beggary and its dole
Of food for fancied priests, when faring ill
They brought her all, to portion out the whole,
So stood she up and looked on Battlestrong:
"Ye bring me dole?" she said, "the alms is fair.
"But what all bring, to all should that belong,
"Lest envy rise; so take ye each his share."
Amazed spoke Arjun: "Mother, my bride I bring.

"Hast thou not heard? Has evening dimmed thine eyes?
"Behold! my bride is daughter of the king;
"She kneels to thee. Oh, bid my bride arise
"And bless her to thy son." But Pritha's face
Darkened with wrath. She answered: "Learn the speech
"Fit for a son. Earth's parents take the place
"Of gods, to children, and with the gods I teach
"What they inspire, who give me sight to see;
"Nor shall I change for any mortal word.
"What? Wouldst thou speak against the Right and me,
"Against the law of Aryans? Hast not heard
"What fate is his who spurns her least request
"Who mothered him, or her command? This earth
"Is not sufficient wide to give him rest;
"The curse of God is on him and his next birth
"Will be a beast's." A silence dark as death
Fell on their spirits chilled with fear and awe;
Till Arjun spoke: "Liefer to lose my breath
"And die at once than live and list thy law;
"Yet must I live; in such a law is God?
"Nay. Better cursed"—But scarce his tongue had ceased
Stumbling, when Battlestrong: "Yea, earth is broad;
"But not so wide that younger sons should feast
"Upon its fairest fruits, while elders fail
"Of right, and sit like beggars with bare hand,

"While they, whom God has made the younger, sail
"Renown's smooth sea and cross to glory's land."

Then Arjun knew his fate and said no more,
Being the younger and by law a slave
To the Head of the House, who, quoting ancient lore
To Drupad, many a proof of legend gave,
Showing that this was but a custom old
And that the fathers' usage sanctioned it,
Saying that knights and many heroes bold
Who once ruled earth through greater might or wit,
Had held, being many, one wedding and one bride,
And brothers oft were husbands of one wife.
So all was overruled and set aside.
That might affront his will or waken strife.

But Battlestrong as chief was first to wed
The weeping bride; then Arjun round the fire
With Krishna went, as if, already dead,
His corpse she followed to the funeral pyre.
Thereafter came the others and the hand
Of each she grasped, as ritual law compelled;
From fire to stone she walked and at command
Five times she took the sevenfold step, upheld
By him beside her, while vain words were said,
And hymns, which mocked her, sung. For pitiless Fate
That loves no mortal needed this one thread
To aid the coming work it would create,

And, moving on though all the world should weep,
Wove her dear life into its mighty woof,
While all the gods sat helpless. For gods keep
Silence when Fate has spoken, but Fate, aloof,
Fears not the gods, they say; yet others say,
"Fate? What is Fate? 'Tis naught." If this were so,
Why did no god help Krishna on that day?
Could they, but would they not? Ah, who can know?

Now sly was he of Hastina, though Fate had made
him blind.
"Cursed be the dead that rise," he said, "and cursed
the friends they find.
"For if Panchala's hated king the Pandus' will obey,
"Whose head will wear the Kurus' crown when
staked in open fray?
"From Dwaraka, the Town-of-Gates, whose lords
love fighting best,
"Has gone, to aid Panchala's cause, the Wizard of
the West,
"Dark Kris, to whom is Arjuna a more than brother
dear;
"He drives the steeds of Arjun's car, like any chari-
oteer,
"And he, this prince who godhead claims, allied with
Drupada
"Can more than match us in the field. The kin of
Arjuna
"Have nursed for years embittered hearts and Dru-
pad's realm is broad
"If they march into Hastina, we Kurus go to God!
"Far better save a smaller half than lose a greater
whole,
"So let us send a messenger and say that Thronheld's
soul
"Is grieving for the wrong he did and yearns to make
amends.

"The Pandus are our cousins dear; shall cousins not be friends?
"Tell them that joyful news today awaits them from my throne;
"That Thronheld old and weary is of ruling here alone;
"His nephews as his children are; let both in peace abide,
"While Thronheld shares his crown with them and they the realm divide."
But to his son, th' Invincible, a word he whispered: "So,
"When they have learned the truth and rage, we lay the Pandus low,
"For none will question us our right to smite in self-defense.
"Who slays a foe with dangerous friends must prove his innocence."

The Pandus heard his messenger. "Some god," they said, "has laid
"His finger on the pulse of man and Thronheld's hatred stayed.
"Now half of Hastina he gives, our old and honest right.
"The day is sure when dawn appears; gone now our sorrow's night.
"Right pleasant to a man it is as welcome guest to roam,

"But sweeter to have said farewell and find himself
at home.
"Perhaps the Kurus now have planned to build an-
other town
"And leave to us our fathers' home, while they seek
fresh renown
"In raising up some mighty fort above the level
plain,
"To make a lordlier Hastina in Thronheld's wide
domain."

They yoked four horses to their car; they could no
longer stay;
They left the Wizard of the West and Drupad's fair
array,
From whom a band of servitors, the gift of Drupada,
Made not too humble their approach, as heirs of
Hastina!

They reached the town, they entered in, they
passed the palace door.
There sat king Thronheld on his throne; whom
lance-men stood before.
The Pandus made obeisance due; they waited what
he said:
Quoth Thronheld: "Well I knew your hearts on old
affection fed.
"Forever now we bury strife; forgot is passion's
deed.

"My realm is yours, the greater half. The priest pours out the mead,
"And half the draught he gives the gods, but half he drinks himself;
"Half gives the host to honored guest, half stores he on the shelf.
"Right honored guests are ye of mine; I praise your knightly powers.
"In God's name take then half the realm, but Hastina is ours.
"For town and desert make my realm. Up! lancers, close me in;
"This town is for my royal sons; the desert for my kin!"

Then was it bitterness to be a Pandu and to live.
A trick of words, and desert land, this all the king would give?
The honest Pandus stood confused his cunning speech to hear;
Their thoughts went very slowly, entangled in his sneer.
Their tongues like desert sands became, they neither moved nor spoke;
Their hearts felt full of emptiness; their silence no man broke.
But as upon the king they gazed (th' Invincible stood by),
And saw the mockery of his glance, the scorning of his eye;

And marked the armèd guard around, and to their spirits came
The knowledge that they were but dupes, and knew at last their shame,
The sword of Arjun leaped its sheath; forth sprang the Knight alone.
Two scores of jangling spears came down and crossed before the throne.
There flashed indeed four swords behind, but hundreds gleamed around.
The Knight on king and courtiers looked and in that trap profound
He saw the heart that hoped for wrath to help it reach the goal,
The king who sought but fair excuse to slay with conscience whole.

Then back he stepped and sheathed his sword and to the lord of men
Gave answer of his subtle wit and spoke, composed again:
"Fear not, thou king of Hastina, and for thy gift, 'tis well,
"But we will be no sons of thine, to save thy soul from hell.
"Our swords are sheathed. Your pious words—were they inspired of heaven?
"Blind heart has he who thwarts a soul to godly duty given.

"For priests say true that single homes gain not such thanks divine
"As when the brothers live apart, with each his separate shrine.
"For many rills on thirsty ground are better than one ditch.
"And where the altars multiply more priests of gods grow rich.
"This thought perhaps king Thronheld had; we know his noble mind,
"He gave us what he promised us. Who fault therewith can find?
"Then cleave ye unto Hastina and rule your guarded land,
"While we go down to Khandava and on the Jumna's strand
"Build up whatever fort we may, to hold and rule our own
"In quietness, which we may break if aught disturb our throne."
They left the home of treacherous hearts; they marched to Jumna's strand.
Some friends there were in Hastina to cheer that little band;
Some allies got they on their way; some got they when they came,
For many trod the borderland who hated Thronheld's name.
"Time has no love for any man," said Battlestrong the Bold,

"The sooner get we reddened swords, the sooner ruddy gold.
"Upon the banks of Jumna's stream our future fortune lies.
"There still are many towns to sack and many a brave emprise
"Awaits us. Peace is not for us; for peace is war's reward.
"Hereafter we will rest at ease but now we draw the sword.
"Or shall we drag our bruisèd limbs to Drupad from the north
"And say, 'Thy sons come limping back, too rashly venturing forth?' "

They built a fort on Jumna's strand; they called it Indraplain.
It lacked not long the spoils of war or captives' sobbing train.
They worshiped Indra every morn and robbed the earth till eve,
And Indra is a generous god when fearless men believe.
Then came the Wizard of the West, for love of Arjuna,
To help them fight, and many more, whom crafty Drupada
Had winged with swords. "What fool," quoth he, "taught Hastin's lord of men.

"When he had caged the tiger's cubs, to set them
free again?
"The elephant may boast his strength, but weak the
huge of limb
"When, one to right and one to left, the tigers glare
at him.
"Build up your town, ye tiger-hearts, and build ye
Thronheld's down.
"The gods who smile on Indraplain on Hastina will
frown."

ARJUNA'S BANISHMENT

Fast fly the busy years that weld a crown.
They built a fort; the fort became a town;
The town, a home for many homeless bands;
The bands an army made, and other lands
Besought them for alliance. Thus erelong
Firmly established, mighty Battlestrong,
One of the world's great leaders, took his place
As ruler even of kings, and 'fore his face
Who saw him frown, fell cowering.
Yet despite
His will unquestioned and unscrupulous might,
He felt abased. If injured pride his breast
Tormented still, who knows? For unconfessed
His feelings, but, though in appearance none
Opposed him absolute, he knew of one;
Since this great king, for all his power and art,
Could not subdue one little human heart.
So when the monarch, looking round him, saw
Ever more peoples yielding to his law,
Yet looking upon Krishna, slight and frail,
Saw her yet loveless (since without avail
Had been his victory and she, conquering
Her victor, showed that Arjuna was king
Of her affection still), when she, his queen,
Obeyed but loved him not—What sword so keen
To wound as jealousy?—His action then
Recorded is, for thus the lord of men,
In Arjun's absence, to his brothers spoke:

"Listen. Not now my kingship I invoke,
"But speak as your co-equal. Hark to this,
"Which I have well determined. When we kiss
"The lotus eyes of Krishna, must we feel
"They but endure our sight and gladly steal
"Away from us to where her fancy plays
"Around another's form, which ever stays
"Housed in her heart? Since first we wed this maid—
"Agni, the Fire-god, came to earth and laid
"Himself upon our altar duly built
"For the marriage-circle, sacred oil was spilt
"Upon his flame; each after each we went,
"I first, the eldest, round it, covenant
"By those seven steps made perfect, and the hand
"Of Krishna held we all, who first? A band
"Of priests beside us sang the wedding-hymn
"Out of the Veda, till mine eyes grew dim
"With looking upon her beauty and even then
"I knew that none among the sons of men
"Loved her as I—since those far days when pain
"Mingled with joy, both love and joy are vain.
"For still she turns, when in our chamber prone
"She lies with me, to look for one alone,
"Who also claims a right! Her pulses slow
"Throb not for me; 'oh, leave me, leave me, go,'
"So speak her evident eyes, while he comes in
"To room and heart alike. Aye, once that sin
"Her knight committed, shaming me beside
"The one he sought, and she? She played the bride
"To him, to Arjun, while my heart was wrung

"With woe unspeakable. I rose and swung
"The doors upon the twain and left our knight
"Toying with Krishna's hair, a pleasant sight,
"Fit for a king, in sooth, him bending down,
"Amorous of her, my queen, as, like a clown,
"I stumbled from their presence. Nevermore!
"Am I not king, and shall my heart be sore,
"My kingship void? O stark unbending will
"And obstinate heart of woman! But I still
"Am lord and eldest. Shall a monarch's wife
"Prefer a subject? Fragment of a life,
"To feel she runs as sunrise to my east,
"To welcome but to lose her! This at least
"May I demand: so swear me that the room
"Sunlit by her shall never know the gloom
"Of others near. Who henceforth dares to cross
"My chamber threshold, mine, I say, the loss
"Of my regard shall suffer, and banished be
"For years enough of wandering misery
"To teach him wisdom. Shall I hold the prize
"And see another snatch it from my eyes?
"By all the gods, I will not. Him I grant
"Pardon for past offense; but let him plant
"His foot less heavily upon my face
"And give his king due honor, or disgrace
"He too shall meet."

The brothers paid good heed
To what their monarch said and straight agreed
To give the oath, nor even Arjun cried
For justice, being younger, but replied,

Hearing thereof, "Who questions, good or ill,
"What gods and monarchs do? I serve him still
"Who king and eldest is and has the right
"In mine and all men's, as in Heaven's own sight,
"To slay me or to banish or to wrong.
"Though he has wronged me, yet this Battlestrong
"Stands in God's place to us, Head of our clan,
"And master of our lives. Since time began,
"Has this been law divine and shall I quail
"At sacrificing aught? I will not fail
"In duty, e'en for love, yet not even he,
"Who robs me of her, robs me utterly.
"For he her body holds, but I her heart,
"And love is ours, howe'er we live apart."

But when that moon had passed, whose complete face
Binds men to contracts made within its space
(For if, ere this, one cries, "Be that undone
"Which I have promised," then, as ne'er begun
The agreement is, since ere the whole month pass
The oath is but half made and as all was,
Before the word was said, is all again—
One moon to fit the changeful hearts of men),
When that whole moon had passed, and none had felt
Repentance for the bond, but humbly dwelt
As subjects with a queen, a righteous act
Done by the Silver Knight undid the pact
And what was bred of selfish passion died

To be reborn in sorrow. For the bride
Of the five brothers, now their queen, was taught
In love that eve by Battlestrong, who sought
To win a heart unwilling and still strove
To see in meek obedience signs of love.
  Now Arjuna was sitting 'neath the light
Of evening's glory, watching where the white
Swift stars leaped forth against day's closing eye,
When suddenly he heard an anguished cry
Of supplication, urging Indra's name;
And soon before the prince a Brahman came,
Wringing his hands and crying "Indra, fight
"For Indra's injured priest." The Silver Knight
Rose to the priest, whose words distressful fell
Thus sharply on his ear, and "Be it well,"
He cried, "with all the Brahmans. Pious Sir,
"What grief is thine?" "Nay," said the priest, "they
    err
"Who say 'tis well. O prince, the realm's undone;
"Robbers have stolen from me. If the sun
"Sets on a kingdom where a weakling king
"Sees good men wronged, 'tis said this impious thing
"Deprives the king of weal, who else will share
"In all the merits sacrifices bear
"To him, as to the worshiper, clear gain
"For kings to reap for nothing, save the pain
"Of doing right; but now is wrong alive
"And justice perishes, because they thrive
"Who rob me, me, whose poor wealth was these cows
"I daily brought without the gates to browse

"Upon the common land, yet here today
"Three thieves made bold to attack me, drove away
"My large-eyed kine, and I plod up and down
"Calling for justice through this sinful town
"And get no help, but mockery; to and fro
"The people pass unheeding; woe, and woe
"Upon this town where no man lends me aid.
"Therefore I call on Indra, for 'tis said
"The prince is Indra's son. Know Indra scorned
"By barbarous robbers; son of Heaven, be warned.
"Help Indra's priest. Wilt thou not haste and slay
"These unbelieving wretches that this day
"May not be prelude to a dreadful night
"Where wrong unpunished triumphs over right?"
Angrily spoke the prince: "What fool shall dare
"Such act and live? By Indra's might I swear
"To teach them reverence. Father, wait thou here
"A moment only; Arjuna will cheer
"Thy drooping heart and thou consoled wilt laugh
"Where now thou weepest. Not because the half
"Of all this kingdom's virtue tempts my hands,
"I succor thee, but what the right demands
" 'Tis mine to do as duty. Now I haste
"To slay these thieves and make their hearts a waste
"Of greed unsatisfied." He sought his sword
Within the hall, where now his king and lord
With Krishna was, but even as he turned
He found a warder standing guard, and learned
That entrance had been barred. But naught the
Knight

Recked now of oaths or wardens and, in spite
Of pact and punishment, pushed wide the door
With noisy entrance. Striding o'er the floor
He grasped the sword, wended about, and sped
Straight-eyed, and silent past the curtained bed
To the outer court. Behind his footsteps rang
The closing door, whose falling echo sang
The exile's fate, unheeded; but the priest
Pointed his way and, far afield, he eased
That garrulous heart of anger, for he found
The thieves together, with the cows around,
And fell quick-handed on them as they sate
Rejoicing in their spoils. His wrath was great,
And blood ignoble dyed the starlit plain,
While the priest drove the slow cows home again.
So Arjun, being banished, left the town
And her he vainly loved and wandered down
The river,—her, forgone but never lost;
Since, like two shipwrecked sailors, tempest-tossed,
Unable to help each other yet too near
To lose each other's faces, from that year
They sailed life's sea, with here and there a word
Which only Heaven and their own spirits heard.

Yet of the things that chanced him, some sublime,
Some earthly are, and some are lost by Time;
But two, retained in minstrels' tales of old,
May here be sung, of many still untold.

The Silver Knight, when years had fled
Since first from Indra's plain he sped,
With hunger faint, with wandering worn,
Had traveled on a day at morn
East, till he saw the stream divine,
Whose waters, like a quickening wine,
Between soft banks are hidden deep
Beside the holy shrines* that keep
The forms of gods. Its currents strong
Unnumbered wonders bear along
From shore to shore, thick hid with trees,
Where lie its wave-hid mysteries.
With painful thought and footstep slow
He came where Ganges' currents flow.
There, wearied out, such thirst he felt
For Ganges, that he paused and knelt
Beside the sacred stream and quaffed
Its flood, when lo! some mocker laughed
Beneath him, as he drank; or gave
That ripple of merriment the wave?
Again he bowed his head and drank;
Again from flood and grassy bank
Echoed a sound; a murmur sweet
It now appeared, as if to greet
His image on the river's face.
And yet no sign he saw or trace
Of any mortal, and no life

* The site of the future Benares.

Stirred round about; but all was rife
With expectation, as some Power
Had with its presence thrilled the hour.
Above him stillness ruled; there spoke
No voice; no cry the silence broke;
No beast his angry challenge threw;
No herald of the morning flew
On eager pinions, sweeping by,
To pierce that brooding mystery.
But earth, as if some god had slept
Upon her bosom, moveless, kept,
As 'twere, that memory in her breast
And silent, awestruck, lay at rest
With half-closed eyes, afraid to stir,
Lest waking take the night from her,
While on her face the dewdrops lay
Like tears, reproachful of the day.
  But as the Knight stood marveling long,
He heard beneath the stream a song,
Which, winding up on rings of sound,
His soul in chains of music bound,
Till, as its melody died above,
His heart recoiled, for only "Love,
"O love," he heard, and "Love, be mine,"
Soft and bitter as ocean's brine.
The Knight shrank back from the swelling tide,
For love had left him dissatisfied;
The Knight recoiled but the music still
O'erwhelmed his mind and charmed his will,
Throbbing intense from lips unseen,

With whisper of waves the words between,
Till Arjun bent to the binding strain
And the voice that sang was still again.
Fair, oh, fair, too fair for scorning
Gleams the light of yonder morning,
O'er wide earth awaking;
Gold and red the dawn is glowing,
Day is coming, night is going,
But thy heart is breaking.
Fair, oh fairer yet the river,
Radiant shines, self-lighted ever,
Rest and beauty blending;
Here no darkness bringeth sorrow,
Here forever glad tomorrow
Follows day's fair ending.
Earthly suns must have their setting,
Earthly bliss, its grief begetting,
Dies and leaves no token,
Save the sob that follows after,
Save the tear that waits on laughter;
Why will hearts be broken?
Here is joy; on earth, lamenting;
Here new hope; on earth, repenting;
Earth hath tears unceasing;
Here the heart knows naught of sighing;
Earthly loves are ever dying;
Here is love increasing.
Warrior, come, no longer grieving;
Wait no longer, unbelieving;
Leave distress behind thee.

Come to me and leave the seeming
Joy of earth for sweeter dreaming
  In the arms that bind thee
Softly, as they close embrace thee;
None shall here from love displace thee;
  Come, and I will guide thee
Where the heart forgets its losses,
To the silver-sanded mosses,
  To long rest beside me.

It was as though his wit were caught
In a silken net of snaring thought;
He bent his head to gaze below.
A face as pure as Himal's snow
Met his beneath the gleaming tide;
Cool arms about his neck did glide,
And they were framed in locks of gold
That did his body and soul enfold;
Upon his mouth red lips were pressed,
Against his heart, an eager breast.
  Then joyed Ulupi, serpent-queen,
Who oft in maiden-form is seen.
With greedy hand she drew the Knight;
Down, down they plunged and with delight
She clasped him close and smiled above
His face with her beseeching love.
Upon the river's shining floor
She set his feet and him upbore
Within her grasp; with magic charms

She kept his breath and in her arms
Held him and cried "Forget thy grief;
"Here love to pain will bring relief."
Deep breathed the Knight and lo! his breath
Came free as that of those whom death
No more can touch; he looked around
And on the river's silver ground
Saw a high palace, green and gold
Walled by a crimson coral wold.
Long grasses waved their fingers fine
And pearl-lined shells gave light divine.
Above him, in that river-sea,
Strange creatures floated, listlessly,
As if to be so calm and slow
Were joy enough for life to know.
And still Ulupi, serpent-queen,
Who man's seducer aye has been,
Held fast his hand and to his heart
Pressed hers with passion's pleading art,
But strong as was her subtile might
Not wholly could she win the Knight;
And all that day they wandered wide
O'er Ganges' pavement, side by side,
Till, at the time of eve on earth,
Ulupi's laugh of tender mirth
Died into silence, while the hour
Was given to love's engrossing power,
And his worn spirit sank to rest
Upon the pillow of her breast.

But when the day rose open-eyed
And through the hollows flowed the tide,
Ulupi dreamed alone of love,
While, standing on the bank above,
Again in dawn's fresh morning air
The Knight said low the sunrise prayer:
"Behind me lies what night has done;
"Its magic cleanse this orison."

There came an end to journeys vague and wonders passing sense.
The wheel of time rolled pleasure up and down went penitence.
The Knight of Silver wandering far on a half-remembered lea
Beheld the town of Dwaraka, that once devoured the sea.
He laughed to heaven to view the town; he trod a hasty way.
Thought he, "On Dwarak's noble street my feet shall walk today.
"And come I to the Town-of-Gates, so seek I out my friend.
" 'Tis well to snatch a little joy mid sorrows without end.
"The king of yonder Dwaraka, who is he else but Kris?
"My more than brother once was he, for sharing grief and bliss.
"But yet, a homeless Knight am I, and he of great renown.
"O walls of stone, O towers of brick, O weight of Dwarak town,
"Are ye but monuments of love to mark its burial-place?
"Can pride of stone entomb a heart and from a human face

"Crush out its ancient friendliness? O friend that
hast been mine,
"I, needing all things, beg for naught save the old
love once thine."
Then turned his thoughts in bitterness to all the
years before:
"My brothers down in Indraplain have vanished
more and more.
"These lonely autumns passing by have drawn as
many veils
"Around the face of her I loved; my spirit gropes
and fails
"To pierce the covering made by time, which hides I
know not what,
"Unless it be new misery. 'Tis better that forgot,
"Forgiven, forlorn, I stay my feet and trust my only
friend
"Than in the mockery of fresh hope find but its cruel
end."
So spoke he from a troubled heart, where trust had
faded out,
And doubt bred of uncertainty had grown to certain
doubt,
For first it seemed the years were short as their near
goal was sweet,
And then it seemed the years were long as leagues to
tired feet,
And now it seemed, when all the leagues of years
were past and gone,
That at the last the goal's great prize was not worth
looking on.

Thus through the race-course of his mind, with whips at either end,
His thoughts like maddened coursers ran; but midway met his friend.
For, as he spoke, the Wizard king the gates of pride came through
And standing in his chariot gazed, and close to Arjun drew.
"Thy friend am I, thy ancient friend, thy charioteer am I;
"Man's love is not as woman's love and cannot fade or die."
With wonder looked the Knight on him, the tears were in his eyes
Whose liquid speech his heart betrayed ere tongue could voice surprise.
"My friend," he said, "O king," he said, "O monarch of great might,
"Thou art a crownèd king of men, I but a banished knight."
Then, both the hands of Arjuna in both his hands, the king,
With kiss of friend on forehead given, this olden stave did sing:
"When love by love is lighted, two fires become the same;
"The years, piled up, but faggots are to feed the deathless flame."
He turned to all his retinue; he called for all to hear:
"Behold my chosen mate in arms and me, his charioteer.

"As once of yore I drove his steeds, ere I was crowned a king,
"So now, to honor him I love, this tribute will I bring."
But little the lords of Dwaraka with Kris were in accord
When thus they saw a homeless knight made welcome by their lord.
They saw their monarch drive the car of knight to them unknown,
While like the rains on desert sands flowed favors from the throne.
But Kris spoke unto Arjuna: "Lift up again thy face.
"There's not a woman born on earth is worth a man's disgrace.
"Give her thou lov'st thy heart and strength, give all desire may crave,
"But keep thy soul beyond her reach, a man, no woman's slave.
"Thou art too good a Knight to waste thy life in coward sighs.
"The heart is bound; the spirit is free. What thinkst thou that my spies
"Have heard of distant Indraplain? There make they feasting long;
"For Krishna presses to her breast the pledge of Battlestrong.
"She holds his child within her arms and croons its face above,
"And mother-love has narrow eyes and sees no second love.

"Not that her heart less friendly beats, for tender is her thought;
"She thinks of thee with kindliness, where kindliness is naught.
"Up! Warrior son and heir of kings. Sit not lamenting here,
"For there be other things on earth a knightly heart to cheer
"Than hope of maiden vainly sought or love for loveless wife.
"This earth needs all its manliness; and man, earth's fullest life.
"Think back the thoughts that once were thine, ere sorrow touched thy face.
"Man's oldest guest is grief. Thy breast is not its only place.
"Thy thoughts were noble in the pride of youth; O chief of men,
"Let not thy manhood from the heights youth scaled descend again.
"For if it grieves to have put trust in one who slew belief,
"If sunshine seems no longer light, darkened by that one grief,
"If to believe and lose belief in one makes all else small,
"How greater than a thousand griefs to lose belief in all!
"For winning but to lose one love hath happed since earth began,

"But woe to them who losing love therewith lose faith in man.
"Bury thy grief, for earth requires her strongest hearts today.
"I speak what Heaven commands me speak; whatever words I say
"Are prompted by the will of God. Go, win a bride again.
"Her love shall be for thee alone and thou be blessed of men.
"Then speed thee swift to Indraplain, where all thy duty lies,
"For lo! the clouds of coming war now darken Indra's skies.
"My sister holds her Choosing soon. Unschooled in love herself,
"She follows still our mother's will, who trades her rank for pelf
"Beneath the screen of Choosing Day. Yet, ere that farce begin,
"Her seeming Choice must first be won. Be thou the man to win.
"But wait not for her lips to speak. Claim thou the warrior's right
"And rape her from the suitors' ranks, as still beseems a knight."

So spoke the king of Dwaraka, well knowing what was best,
And that a knightly feat of arms may arouse a laggard breast;

Well knowing that the time was short ere they in Indraplain
Would need their bravest champion's sword to win their own again.
The Silver Knight looked on the king; all doubting was his eye.
"I care not for the maid," said he, "but I the deed will try."

The maid surnamed the Beautiful to make her Choosing came,
Not knowing Arjuna had made his choice twixt grief and fame.
Ere they of Dwaraka could lay a faltering hand on sword,
He seized the maiden from their midst and turned without a word.
With Dwarak's lords surrounding him he did that warrior deed
And stole her like a knight of old, whose courage made his creed.

Right lustily they cursed the Knight, the gallant lords around,
Right eager shouted to the gods and stormed across the ground
As Arjun reached his waiting car. Too late their fierce alarms;
He drove down Dwarak's noble street, the maiden in his arms.

One hand upon the reins he held, one arm round
Subhadra,
He vanished sudden as he came. Then Kris of
Dwaraka
With taunting words the suitors vexed: "Ye brought
your tradesman's gold;
"Ye thought to tempt a royal heart and wed where
love was cold.
"Back to your homes; a nobler game than yours has
Arjun played,
"Who, winning as a knight should win, the ancient
law obeyed."
The frown of them that sued with gold grew darker
as they heard,
But few there were in Dwaraka to challenge kingly
word.

But Subhadra the Beautiful, should she be fair in
vain?
No maid was she to shun for naught a hurt not
wholly pain.
He circled her within his arms; she shrank with
frightened pride;
She felt the beating of his heart, her heart to his
replied.
"Is it for love of me," she asked, "the daughter of a
queen,
"That thou hast thus besmirched my worth, where
stainless I have been?

"Nay. Tell me not. No love hast thou. Who knows
not Krishna's name?
"Who has not heard what banished thee? Thy kisses
are my shame."

He held her tightly in his arms. He murmured:
"Thou art fair;
"Not fair as Krishna's sunlight is, for burning and
despair;
"But like the calmer light of stars that drives the
dark from heaven;
"To be a fire of holy flame wast thou to Arjun given.
"Another flame, like sunshine bright, is mine, but
walled about;
"A lamp I do not feed with oil nor yet can put it out.
"Imprisoned in my heart it is, burning I know not
why;
"And woe to thee if aught offend what once has lit
my sky.
"Yet thou—no light above thee now shall darken e'er
thy heart,
"For she is as the sun gone down, but thou my star-
light art."
They journeyed from the sea-girt town for twenty
days and four.
To Indraplain on Jumna's strand the Knight his
maiden bore.
Glad greeting got they from the throne and louder
from the town;

But Subhadra to Krishna went and would have kissed her gown.
"Thou art the first and best beloved," fair Subhadra said low,
Then swelled the tide in Krishna's heart. She answered: "Say not so,
"Sweet child; the flowers of many years have blossomed here and died
"Since last the drops I used to shed for Arjuna have dried.
"Now thou (indeed I love thee, child), now thou shalt fill my place."
Therewith she bent above her babe and the tears were on her face.
But through the never-drying love that watered still her heart
Her soul looked into Subhadra's; she played her noble part.
"The King and I," she whispered close, "we both have wished it long;
"Right welcome com'st thou to our throne, to me and Battlestrong."
So soft her speech in tenderness, so winning was her look,
They seemed as gentle as the hand which now her babe forsook
To touch the head of Subhadra and welcome home the bride,
Though smiling eyes and kindly voice not all her heart could hide.

Then all the soul of Subhadra with love began to stir;
She sate her down by Krishna's side and took the child from her.
"Its father's face, I ween," she said, "and God its sire defend.
"For Arjun honors Battlestrong and bade me deem him friend.
"Not womanlike are men of tongue and he who captured me
"Hath told me oft what love is his for Indraplain—and thee.
"Right well I know what sorrow's thought has long filled all his soul,
"And that to visit Battlestrong was not our only goal."
At eve they sat by Krishna's door and watched the changing light,
As royally the sun went down and stars illumed the night.

BHIMA'S WRESTLING

Kris followed close on Arjun's heels:
"Now buds the bloom of hope.
"Ye know not yet what Fate reveals
"Nor what your fortune's scope.
"But many a fortress now shall yield
"That still has mocked your might;
"For Arjun now is in the field
"Whose sword and arrows' flight
"Will help you build your towered town
"High as the fame ye rear.
"Mow down with him your foes' renown;
"The day supreme draws near."

At home they wrought, abroad they fought;
They mowed their foes like grass;
Their reaping swords like autumns brought
Their springtime hopes to pass.
They sent their armies north and west
(Yet bade them Hastin spare),
But south and east, those lands oppressed,
Not yet their zeal could dare.
The jaws of death, the fearful south,
Where Yama holds his sway,
The southern east, the Tiger's Mouth,
Still barred their conquering way.
There ran a messenger alone;
To Indraplain he sped;
He bowed before the Pandus' throne

And biting words he said:
"Look east to south and look for war;
"There Might all Right defies.
"The king of Magadha afar
"Makes human sacrifice.
"Fierce Jarasand his captive foes
"Will at his altars slay;
"Their hearts, their lives, their thrones are those
"Who rescue them this day."
Great Battlestrong was wroth to see
That runner's tearful face.
Cried Arjuna: "Who goes with me,
"To crush that dastard race?
"Shall we not teach them how to reign
"Beneath the southern star?
"Their altars, wet with human stain,
"Call every knight to war.
"Or I alone will dare the fight,
"Or Bhima joins with me,
"Or Kris, our friend, shall add his might,
"To make a sacred three.
"For never since our race began,
"If ever man did then,
"Have kings made sacrifice of man."
" 'Tis but a wild beast's den,"
Said Bhima, "We the beast will slay.
"Would we had worthier foe."
Said Kris: " 'Tis time we were away;
" 'Twere well, disguised to go."
But Battlestrong was sore perplexed.

"A very sinful king
"Is Jarasand," said he, "and vexed
"Am I to hear this thing.
"And yet, O brothers, 'tis the south;
"Ye are my eyes to me;
"If ye descend the Tiger's Mouth,
"How may your monarch see?"
"Fie," said the Knight, "if battles ceased,
"Could cowardice still save
"A man from death? From worth released,
"What odds, a Knight or slave?
"This king will eat of ghastly food
"And sacrifice accurst.
"Shall man partake of human blood?
"Shall Might or Right come first?"

Then said the king of Indraplain
"Go, and God bring you home again."

So, close enrobed they crossed the land,
Well hidden from men's eyes,
And came before King Jarasand
Clothed in a priestly guise.

"Now who be ye that come thus clad,
"Like pious slaves of God,
"As if no treacherous thoughts ye had?
"Why gaze ye at the sod?
"Look up, speak out; your forms are tall;

"Why stand ye earthward bent?
"I think ye be no priests at all,
"But spies against me sent.
"Off with your robes! Behold if wars
"On limbs thus humbly dressed
"Have not left deep their telltale scars,
"To mock the lying breast."
They flung the priestly gowns to earth;
Their scars of battle shone;
They stood revealed in warrior worth,
Three knights against a throne.
"The scars your bowstrings made," said he,
"Were never graved in play;
"Upon your breast your wounds I see;
"I welcome you today.
"Your arms and breasts bescarred show plain
"That knights or kings ye are.
"The journey shall not be in vain
"That ye have made afar.
"Speak out your message to my face
"Your names and comings all,
"If ye be proud enough of race,
"As sacrifice ye fall."
Then sternly spoke Knight Arjuna:
"King of a barbarous throne,
"Our lips shall speak in Magadha
"To noble ears alone.
"For thee, enough to find us here;
"Yet know us whence we be:
"Sons of the gods, unknown to fear,

"And Aryan knights are we.
"Our mothers from the uplands came,
"Our fathers came from God;
"And he who knows the path of Fame
"Can tell where we have trod.
"Now here we stand to brave thy power,
"And scorn the shame thou art,
"Here challenge thee to bloody hour
"For proving thy vile heart.
"Who breaks the law that God hath set
"On mortal man below,
"He breaks in twain his coronet
"And finds in God his foe.
"Thou, who hast led a lusting life
"Of sin and godless pride,
"Art challenged, king, to mortal strife.
"Thou dar'st not step aside.
"One of us three will fight with thee,
"Whomever thou wilt choose.
"No knight, if knight indeed he be,
"Such challenge may refuse."

"Well spoken, from a daring heart,"
Said Jarasand, "I know
"What fashions keep us knights apart
"From vulgar men, and so
"Thy challenge holds. My arms are strong;
"No king unknightly I.
"Now which of you can wrestle long
"And yearns today to die?"

Quoth Bhima: "Wrestling got me fame;
"Therein I find my joy.
" 'Twill be to me a pleasing game
"A braggart to destroy."
"Come," said the king, "we wrestle now.
"Why toss we gibes about?
"A little hour thy strength will cow,
"And stain the sand without."
They came unto a sandy place
And stood like lions face to face.

Now brave was cursèd Jarasand;
"As knights ye come," said he,
"And foremost wrestler of this land
"Am I, and thus shall be
"Our wrestling's prize. If he can fling
"My body to the earth,
"Then free shall go each captive king,
"Whose slaughter gives me mirth.
"But if, when this our sport be done,
" 'Tis he that fallen lies,
"Then fit your souls to greet the sun,
"For you I sacrifice."

Down stooped the twain and, crouching low,
Each hurled his body 'gainst the foe.

Then fast on forehead, chin, and breast
The blows fell, well directed,

Quick plied the fists and sore distressed
The guard which wit protected.
Oft closed the fingers on the throat,
Oft crashed the ponderous hand
As Jarasand great Bhima smote,
And Bhima, Jarasand.
Until, with bodies interlocked
And joined in one embrace,
Their struggling knees together knocked
And face encountered face,
While sinews cracked and cords grew great
Amid the groaning moil.
They fought to turn the hand of Fate
And knew no thought but toil.
Elbow to elbow, hand to hand,
Their bodies streamed with gore;
Their eyes saw only reeling land
And the raw flesh before.
But God resolved the desperate fight
And hard-won victory crowned the Right.

For when the day was well-nigh sped,
Strength failed the king accurst;
He staggered and his eyes grew red
As if his heart had burst.
But Bhima seized his gasping mouth
And tore it, jaw from jaw;
Then shrieked the spoiler of the south,
The scorner of God's law,

Till Bhima's fingers' brazen yoke
The neck of that vile monarch broke.

None stayed them when the little band
Hied back to Indraplain,
For e'en the friends of Jarasand
Rejoiced to know him slain.

Hastin they spared, though able now to cope
With stronger chiefs than Hastin's, having hope
Of feuds extinguished 'neath an imperial throne.
For now as lord of lords (and Kris alone
Knew how ephemeral is the pride of power)
And Emperor, whom other kings must dower
With priceless tribute, Battlestrong stood forth
Lord of all India, east, south, west, and north,
To whose coronation as great King of kings
Each lesser monarch with his underlings
Came, bringing offerings, pearls and weight of gold,
Skins, subtly dyed, swift steeds, robes, treasure old,
And countless cattle. Yet, for friendship's sake,
Drupad and Kris were asked, as guests, to make
Obeisance only and no tribute brought.
But Hastin's king a sterner message taught
His hated obligation: "Come and own
"That Battlestrong is Emperor; else your throne
"Will crumble with your pride. But we demand
"No tribute of poor kinsmen." Blind and old,
Thronheld, now feeble, by his son controlled,
Dared not refuse and so, in Thronheld's name,
Th' Invincible, enraged but helpless, came
And bowed his head and played the loyal friend
Of honored kin. But with the ritual's end
Returning home, he met those councillors
Whose voice must first approval give to wars
And other weighty acts, and spoke: "How long

"Will Kuru pride support this Battlestrong
"Whom Kuru warriors fear? When open strife
"Avails not, wit remains, a means of life
"Taught by all creatures whom the strong oppress."
Therewith he drew a dicebox from his dress
And from the box a pair of cowries took,
Crying, "Guile conquers force. Look, Kurus, look
"Upon our way to freedom. 'Neath this lid
"Wealth, power, and vengeance at our will lie hid.
"O dull of thought, why stare with blank surprise?
"Behold these dice, whom men 'Ill-fortune's eyes'
"Abusing call. Yet what great wealth is theirs
"For him that comprehends them well and dares
"Trust them and fate. Sakun, our uncle, knows
"How to control Ill-fortune and he throws
"Foreseeing what will happen, when the dice
"Leap to the board. We all have paid the price
"Of learning this, for many a merry game
"His hand has won him, as it won his name,
"Sakun, the swooping Hawk. But too the law
"Ye know of Aryans, never to withdraw
"When challenged to a contest. Who refuse
"To fight or gamble, knightly honor lose.
"Then if he yonder plays, what limit set
"To that ourselves may win? His coronet
"Itself may well be ours, if once he yield
"And meet our challenge."

So the pact was sealed.
For none opposed him who in fact was king,
Since Thronheld, now grown old, in everything

Followed his son's strong guidance and in name
Only was king, to whom th' Invincible came,
And Thronheld humble in his blindness heard
The plot nefarious, speaking no firm word,
(For firmness to his spirit was ne'er akin),
To stay th' Invincible's course, save only, "Sin
"Is said to lie in gambling"; thus he muttered,
To whom the Prince, swift as that word was uttered:
"There is no sin save weakness. To the strong
"Heaven's self is kind. To them all things belong,
"All rights, all laws. But strength of arm or brain?
"The first alone is his of Indraplain;
"The second, mine, so strength is matched with strength.
"What sin is ours, if Hastina at length
"Win back her ancient glory? Where is now
"The conqueror's crown that once adorned our brow?
"Where but in Indraplain! What sights I saw,
"When there, in humble mien, I learned the law
"Of courtier, I, Kur's son, learned e'en to know
"What riches are, such wealth the Pandus show
"To a world astound. Their very plates are gold
"And all their trappings our poor service old
"Mock still with greater luxury, on whose treads
"Rare skins lie thick; dyed coverings deck their beds;
"Their garments gleam with pearls. To slaves they threw
"Such gowns as we might covet, red and blue;

"Their very pave is crystal, like a lake.
"Thinking it so, I raised my robe, to take
"A shortened stride and shun it, when that boor
"Called Bhima laughed and cried, ' 'Tis but the floor,
" 'Step bravely on,' and to his ridicule
"Bent I my lowered head, as 'neath their rule
"The whole earth now must bow. E'en ocean yields
"Its daily tribute to them, while their fields
"Two hundred thousand kine are said to feed.
"The hundred Kings whom Bhima's wrestling freed
"Their humble courtiers are, who meek as slaves
"Wait on his beck, their Emperor! By the graves
"Of our forefathers, Bharata and Pur,
"By all the kings that have been born of Kur
"For forty generations, I cry war
"On those whose fortunes our own merits mar
"And make our pride their mockery. O my sire,
"Within my heart flames only one desire,
"To see our enemy humbled in the dust
"By any possible means. Do but entrust
"The means to me, and I and Sakuna
"Will once again give this our Hastina
"Its ancient fame; refuse, and it will lie
" 'Neath Pandu feet forever; but not I.
"For ere again such torture I endure
"As did I there, I perish; of this be sure.
"For nevermore will I of food partake
"If this thou grantest not; then for my sake,
"If not for Hastin's, give at last consent
"And let me live again."

Then feebly bent
The king upon his staff and moaning spoke:
"I fear thy plan, yet will I not provoke
"Thy soul to further madness. Shouldst thou die,
"Mine eldest son, how wretched then were I!
"Do as thou wilt, for thou perhaps knowst best;
"I, blind and old and feeble, have not guessed
"How fatal is their grandeur. Live, my son;
"Thou must not die; thou art the dearest one
"Of all my children, child no more in sooth,
"And quickly now thou mayst be king in truth,
"For soon I think the last of the weary years
"Life leaves to helpless age will dry the tears
"Of these blind eyes forever." Sad he spoke,
But from his hands the Prince impatient broke
And, having gained his purpose, left the throne
For secret conference with the Hawk alone,
Who sent anon a herald to Indrapat:
"Hastina greets thee; let the visit that
"We payed thee be returned, affection's sign
"To those who love thee and would fain combine
"Love, sport, and feasting. To a friendly game
"Of dice th' Invincible, in his father's name,
"Invites his kin and calls the Emperor out,
"Who ne'er was asked to try a noble bout
"Of arms or dice in vain, but as true knight
"Meets all who challenge him, to play or fight."

This message heard and pondered, Battlestrong
Nor took advice nor hesitated long,

But cried: " 'Tis good. Tomorrow we depart,
"Pleased to revisit Hastina. My heart
"Greets every challenge gladly. Come what will!
"Fate oft deludes, but lures men onward still;
"A risk is ever a joy. But I am blest
"Of Fate thus far and many have confessed
"My skill at dice."
So went the Pandus forth
At morning light and journeyed to the north,
And with them Krishna, at her lord's command,
Went too, still loveliest mid the lovely band
Of maids attendant, till by slow degrees,
On forest roads, 'neath intertwining trees,
They, ere the moon another quarter passed,
Reached Hastin's gloomy walls and bastions vast.

The car of Indra thundering rolled athwart the evening sky;
Out of the west the darkness came and swallowed day's great eye.
But through the gates of Hastina flared like a second day
The blazing light of torches bright in the great king's array.
Proud, into prouder Hastina, he led his royal band;
The Silver Knight and Bhima held his rein at either hand;
Upon his right huge Bhima went, for next in age was he;
Upon his left, the Pandus' Pride; behind, the Twins, and she
Who had the fairest, sweetest face that love had ever taught,
The purest heart and truest wife that ever home was brought.

To Sakun spoke th' Invincible: "Do thou and Hardheart go
"And greet our cousins, whom I hate as ne'er I hated foe.
"Give them from me and Thronheld words of welcome; well may play
"The lion with the hunted deer ere he devours his prey."

Sakun, the Hawk, and Hardheart went; right humble
was their word;
The heart of the All-conqueror beat gladly as he
heard.
Then, as they talked, th' Invincible, in princely state
drew near,
Who led them to the palace door and gave them
words of cheer:
"I trow your journey has been slow with women in
your train;
"The greater joy, the joy deferred, to see our kin
again.
"How left ye queenly Subhadra, how fares your
mother old,
"And where is Kris, the king, or god, of whom such
tales are told?
"So many questions from the heart are thronging to
the lip
"I know not what to ask ye first, for love hath seized
the whip
"And lashed my tongue to run a race with all my soul
would know.
"But take your ease and break your fast and to your
chambers go.
"There will ye find such raiment poor as Hastina can
boast;
"Wash off the journey's saucy dust and seek again
your host,
"Who never with a gladder heart the hand to guest
has given,

"For through the interchange of love we make of earth a heaven."

So spoke the Prince Invincible with kindly voice and eye.
He touched his forehead to the ground and let the Emperor by;
But when the Emperor passed him by and all his train was gone,
There came into his face such look that, had they gazed thereon,
The Pandus would have grasped with speed the swords they laid away
And donned their closest fighting gear to watch that fatal play.

Out from the robing-chamber came the Pandus' haughty king,
But, ere they sate them at the board for feast and revelling,
He sought Gandhari, Thronheld's queen, and to her veilèd face
Gave salutation, as a king greets dames of noble race.
"The mother of th' All-Conqueror," said he, "is old and weak,
"But as her son to Hastin came these words her lips did speak:
" 'Greet thou fair Hastin's mother-queen and say my loom is still;

" 'But weaker than its oldest woof be now all threads of ill
" 'That once of yore in Hastina the wheel of discord spun.
" 'Let kindness ravel hatred's web, ere Pritha's life be done.' "

The queen of Thronheld, son of Kur, threw her white veil aside;
All old and wrinkled stood she up, a tower of ancient pride.
The flame that for a score of years had smoldered in her breast
Broke blazing from her flashing eyes; her tongue supplied the rest:
"If e'er thou com'st to Indraplain, thou humbler of my son,
"Say to Gandhari's goal of hate that bitter waters run
"Forever from a bitter fount. What Pritha's lips have said
"Was spoken but to mock my heart and serves my scorn, instead.
"Tell her the Kurus nobler are than any king of kings;
"And for the insult of her word fresh hate Gandhari brings."

Because a woman's bitterness spoke that which he had heard

The king of kings in silence turned and went without
a word.
But to blind Thronheld's audience-hall strode he
with sombre look,
As one who humble duty does but will no humbling
brook.
"Hail, father of th' Invincible. I greet thee, man to
man;
"Strange welcome got I from thy queen; like battle's
sharpest van
"Her greeting was." Old Thronheld rose, dim-eyed
was he and weak,
Such show of stuttering wrath he made that he could
scarcely speak.
"The rage of woman," faltered he, "means nothing
to a sage.
"The queen is not of tender thought; bethink thee of
her age.
"Her heart still clings to memories old that others
have forgot;
"She still will hate the wheel of Fate and patience
knoweth not.
"Her anger on her pride has fed; her eyes and mind
are dim.
"But Thronheld greets thee as for both; then hear
thou only him."
Therewith he laid his feeble hand on the All-Con-
queror's brow:
"Hail to my brother's son," he said, "who rules the
Kurus now.

"Would that I too were young enough to feast you in our hall,
"But Hastin's Prince is as the king; the Prince will care for all."

They sat before the loaded board; it was a warrior feast.
They ate the flesh of slaughtered deer and drank as drinks a priest,
When the gold moon-plant yields its juice to give the draught divine
And fill the hearts of gods and men with happiness benign.
And as the immortal maids above serve nectar, god by god,
And play in heaven on silver bells, so lightly round them trod
Maids of immortal loveliness and played on harp and lute,
Till 'neath the strains of music low the heroes' tongues grew mute.
In fluttering veils and golden chains the maids were all arrayed;
To every knight they gave delight and long they danced and played.
But when the royal feast was done, went every knight to bed
And they whom loneliness oppressed went well accompanied.

But when the clouds, the gods' red kine, which pasture in the sky,
Came running from the glowing east and the sun rose on high,
Then woke the guests of Hastina and sought the gaming-hall,
Where two by two the Elders sat, in rows against the wall.
The Hawk stood by the gaming-board; beside him lay the dice;
Within the hand of Battlestrong rested a pearl of price.
"Now, Prince of Kurus, tall thy stake," said he, "for here I hold
"A pearl, whose mother was the sea, set in a ring of gold.
"It hath inestimable worth. Name thou the counter-stake."
Then quickly spoke th' Invincible: "This compact first we make:
"Sakun shall cast, but mine the stake; his loss or gain for me;
"My crown of gold against thy pearl, whose mother was the sea."
"Strange compact this," said Battlestrong, and lingered ere he played;
But in his hands he took the shells. "What odds to me," he said,
"Who throws the dice? Let Sakun cast; much skill have I of Heaven.

"Stake but enough and play me fair; I seal the compact given."
He flung the shells; down leaped the dice; their master's heart they knew;
With trembling haste they hid their best, their worst remained in view.
"Now mine the throw," false Sakun cried, and took the shells in hand;
The little cowries turned and shook, to feel his soft command.
They rolled, obedient to his will, upon the table tossed;
The Hawk looked up at Battlestrong, "Lo, Emperor, thou hast lost."
"My chariot next," said Battlestrong, "eight steeds thereto, well loved,
"And gold piled in, against this pearl that traitor to me proved."
The cowries on the table rang, by magic turned and crossed,
They rattled fast from Sakun's hand: "Again, great king, and lost."
"I have at home," said Battlestrong, "a treasure-house of jars,
"Unnumbered jewels in them each, with each an hundred bars
"Of purest gold. Now thousands stake and wager like a king."
Quoth Sakuni, "An equal store against the stake ye bring."

Twice rolled the dice. "Thou losest still," said
Sakun, "try once more."
"A thousand maids," cried Battlestrong, "the fruit
of joyful war,
"With jewels on their bosoms hung, in costly raiment
clad,
"Adorned with anklets gemmed with pearls, these
for the jars I had."
Again he threw the trembling shells, again cried
Sakun, "Lost."
"Now, by the gods," said Battlestrong, "and if it
kingdoms cost,
"I yet will win. As many men I pledge, each man a
slave
"Fit for the retinue of a king,—these for the girls I
gave."
Twice rolled the dice. "Lost, Emperor, lost." But
now an angry frown
Settled upon the Emperor's face. "What magic
weighs me down,
"To check my skill? My cattle all, two hundred
thousand kine."
Twice rolled the dice. The Hawk looked up. "Lost,
Emperor, all are mine."
"A thousand elephants of war, four thousand warlike
steeds,
"This for my kine." The Hawk looked up. "Lost,
Emperor! Now, who needs
"The chariots that those stallions drew? Stake
those," "Aye, be it so,"

Said Battlestrong, "a thousand cars of war and swift to go."
The dice won all his cars of war. "What, still?" cried Battlestrong.
"But sixty thousand Aryan knights to Indraplain belong.
"I stake the knights." "And lose them, Sire," said Sakun, "now the rest;
"For every knight retainers hath and human stakes are best;
"Or fear'st thou further play?" he sneered. "Fear?" cried the Emperor, "all
"I stake, till nothing more remains, my riches great and small,
"To win whatever I have lost. Can Emperors be afraid?
"Nay, never have I shrunk from man, whatever casts be played."
The Hawk's eye smote upon the shells like sun on quaking frost,
Again they trembled, rolled, and turned. "Lo, all is played and lost,"
Quoth Sakun, "now one venture more, for final loss or gain;
"Against this town of Hastina stake thou thy Indraplain."
Beside their lord the Pandus sat; they neither spoke nor moved
To halt the madness of that play and save the town they loved.

For ill beseems a noble knight to check his lord at play;
And Aryan hearts may never blench though all be swept away.
But, springing to the Kuru's side, his councilor, Vidur,
Spoke: "Stop the play; pause while ye may; for sorrow, be ye sure,
"Will follow on the track of gain. The Hawk is false at heart.
"What mean ye then to leave your kin? What think ye? Will they part
"Thus calmly from the greatest throne god Indra looks upon?
"Now hearken to a wise man's words, for all your wits are gone.
"Ye stand upon a precipice, nor see beneath your feet;
"Your gain is loss; your winnings, death; for Justice's steps are fleet.
"What though our Aryan law restrains yon knights from speaking now,
"And, if until the Emperor stops, they still must smile and bow
"Before the madness of their king? Think ye, when once 'tis done,
"That they will hand you Indraplain? 'Tis no man's skill hath won.
"What if these honest fools at last see straight? Stop while ye may,

"Or long shall Hastina lament the playing played today."
Up flared the wrath of Hastina: "Whate'er we Kurus do,
"We brook no interference. Go; my crown is small for two.
"Who made thee king of Hastina? I rule myself alone.
"My will is my sole councilor. Leave thou the Kurus' throne."
Then left Vidur the gaming-hall, but did not quit the town,
Knowing the quicker wrath springs up the quicker sinks it down.
"All hail the great All-Conqueror," the Hawk sneered, "much is won,
"And all is lost; so now, methinks, the Emperor's game is done."
"Lost, all is lost?" said Battlestrong. "Who mocks an Emperor's game?
"And who will thwart me when I play for victory and for fame?
"I play—my crown? Nay, that I lost. But much is left to me.
"Eldest am I, their lord am I; my brothers still are free."
He spoke, but stumbled in his speech. Then cried the Hawk again,
"Now, bravo, great All-Conqueror, behold we play like men.

"Here stand the Twins, a godlike pair; for them the dice be tossed."
The dancing cowries touched the board. The Twins were played and lost.
Loud laughed the Hawk and stroked the dice. "Long gaming have we stood.
"Thou hast indeed a hero's heart. Now make thy boasting good
"And, with thy younger brothers lost, enslaved before thy sight,
"Play thou once more, the next of age, and stake the Silver Knight."
Black horror seized on Battlestrong; he felt his brain grow weak;
But drunk with gaming was his soul; he forced himself to speak.
"I play the Knight and all he hath," he muttered to the Hawk,
But on the table held his gaze, lest aught his fortune balk.
He trembled like the writhing dice, he dared meet no man's eye.
The Silver Knight in speechless pride stood motionless thereby,
Too loyal to his brother's throne to question or to doubt.
His life and freedom were his king's till the king's game was out.
Into the air they flung the shells for the high-hearted knight,

For his great bow, Gandiva, and for his horn of might.
The cowries won the Sliver Knight and all that he held dear,
His great horn, Devadatta, whose sounding bringeth fear,
The bow Gandiva, shaped in heaven, the steeds th' immortals gave,
And Arjuna, the Pandus' Pride, became the Kurus' slave.
But ever glowered within the king the madness born of play.
"I hold this game for life or death, till all be swept away.
"Here stands my last; intrepid he; as valiant as myself;
"Bhima I stake, my own right arm, worth all my worldly pelf."
The hand of Bhima touched the Hawk and touching swept aside,
But instantly spoke Arjuna: "Was not our king defied?
"And shall the Pandu Emperor, dishonored in men's eyes,
"Not stake whatever stake he will, whatever servant dies
"Or lose freedom? Hold thy hand. Die rather than do wrong.
" 'Tis more than life, 'tis knightly worth at stake; for that be strong."

Silent stood Bhima and ashamed, nor moved he hand or tongue.
The magic power of Sakun's hand the dice for victory flung.
"And have ye more," cried Sakun then, "as sacrifice to bring?
"Or is he destitute of all, who lately was a king?"
"King am I still," cried Battlestrong, "I have myself to lose.
"I, Battlestrong, play Battlestrong; no challenge I refuse."
Once more upon the table's groove the cowries played their game;
Once more the Hawk looked laughing up: "Th' All-Conqueror hath his name.
"All else is lost. Oh, foolish stake, there being aught beside,
"To play thyself, forgetting her who still remains thy bride.
"Then pledge thy Krishna, win with her thy all, that now is mine.
" 'Tis but a little stake to lay, this famous queen of thine.
" 'Tis said she has the lucky signs, a favorite of the gods;
"It were not wonderful if she, so wondrous, turned the odds."

But as he spoke and seized the dice and waited for the word,
The faces of the brothers blanched, they trembled as they heard.
For what themselves as slaves endured, was what brave men may bear,
But Krishna was the sacred love of all, not only fair
Of form, but dear through more than this, and less for beauty loved
Than for a charm of winsome grace that all men strangely moved.
A beauty of the soul had she, which crowned her more than queen
And made her loved of everyone, as none had ever been.
Still paused the king. The crafty words hummed buzzing through his brain.
" 'Tis but a throw of dice," he thought, "and all is mine again.
"A little stake, to turn the odds? Nay, Krishna's form is tall.
"How stately she, how fair to see and hold man's heart in thrall!
"Her eyes like autumn-lotus shine, her beauty passes praise,
"Welcome as autumn welcome is after long summer days;
"Gentlest and dearest—nay! No more. If all save her be gone,

"Then—Battlestrong am I and king and cannot yield. Play on."
The dice for Krishna's fate were flung; again the Emperor lost.
"Joy!" cried the Prince of Hastina, "now let their arms be crossed
"And bound; strip off their silken gowns." The voices of the old
Quavered across the gaming-hall and some were overbold
And cried out, "shame"; but sternly spoke th' Invincible to all:
"This is no people's meeting-place (he said); a royal hall
"Is built for kings; let no man speak." Then shrank they back dismayed,
While the dull light of evil thought o'er their lord's features played.
"Bring forth," he cried, "this whilom queen." To her of royal birth
Prince Hardheart ran. The Pandus five bowed them in shame to earth.
But to the women's inner court sped fast that soul of sin
And burst into queen Krishna's room, who sat unveiled within.
"Thy lord will see thee in the hall; come now without thy veil."
She looked at him with startled eyes; her heart began to quail.

She drew the scarf across her face; she turned to him again:
"Prince, go and ask of Battlestrong if I be seen of men."
Before her virtue cowered the prince, but answered: "Say'st thou so?
"Thy lord is the Invincible; he speaks, and thou must go.
"Thy Battlestrong staked first himself, upon the cowries' cast,
"And, when that maddest throw had failed, he staked and lost thee last."
Then answered she: "Not lost am I, whom Aryan law will save,
"If Battlestrong before he threw had made himself a slave.
"For slaves possess nor gold nor child nor wife; then how could he
"Who first enslaved himself at dice, possession claim in me?
"Back, Hardheart, to the Elders go, and say thou com'st again
"To learn if I be slave of slave or queen of Indraplain."
He bore her question to the hall and not an Elder spoke,
They were as mute as docile cows beneath the wagon's yoke.
But taunting cried th' Invincible: "Who ruleth here, good prince?

"Thy king commands, 'tis thine to act. Or does brave Hardheart wince
"Before the tongue of servile shrew?" Then angry back he fled.
He seized fair Krishna by the arms and forced them o'er her head;
He stripped the covering from her face, he tore her linen down;
He bared her body to the waist and left her half a gown.
He dragged her helpless to the hall across the court-yard sand.
He smote her struggling, that her blood stained red his dastard hand.
But at the door fear mastered pride; her lips with terror shook.
"Not this," she cried, "oh, prince, not this; how may I living brook
"The eyes of men beneath a robe that is but nakedness?"
"What odds," he said, "what slaves may brook or what a slave's distress?
"Thou art the common wife of slaves." Then said she nothing more;
But Hardheart grasped her by the locks and dragged her through the door.
"Now let us see this beauty rare," exclaimed the Kuru king.
"Is this the Pandus' famous spouse of whom the poets sing?

"Ill suits her such a wretched garb; tear off that ragged dress
"And let us see what prudery hides. Hath she still comeliness?"
Faint was she, sick, her limbs relaxed, her heart from Hastina
Leaped back; down went the screen of years: "Help, help me, Arjuna."
Yet useless was her piercing cry and vain her wild appeal.
He could but answer with a look, whose arm was held in steel.
Then Bhima raised his shackled hands and rage shook all his frame.
"Now hark," he cried, "thou son of Kur, thou hound that lovest shame.
"Hear thou my vow, hear Bhima's vow: May the great hand of God
"Turn me from Heaven forevermore and fling my soul abroad
"Through all his hells, if what I swear I fail to render good,
"For, as I live and see the light, I yet will drink thy blood."
But she that was so pure of heart, who ne'er had offered wrong
To modest thought or wifely due, stood up before the throng
And, turning from her stricken lords, looked up to Him on high,

While through the awestruck gaming-hall rang her
despairing cry:
"God Vishnu, Savior, help me now; save thou the
Pandus' queen.
"If always I have loved thy law and ever constant
been
"In thought and speech and action true, hide thou
my form and face.
"God, save thy loyal worshiper, and spare me this
disgrace."
Then lo, a wonder sent from heaven—for ere her
garment fell,
A cloudlike veil in countless folds enwrapped her
close and well,
And fear came on them as they gazed, beholding how
she stood
By man forsaken, saved of God, in stainless woman-
hood.
But as they dared to breathe once more, and deep
the Elders sighed,
Loud brayed an ass within the court and birds ill-
omened cried,
Startling again the Prince, who paled: "Break up the
meeting straight.
"Go silently. Speak naught of this. My further word
await."
Then stole they silently away. But one, who feared a
thing
So dark with omens, Thronheld sought and to that
timid king

Whispered, till dread o'erpowered his soul: "It is a fearful day
"For Hastina and for our throne. They must be got away
"Unharmed; the Prince has gone too far. Mayhap a kindly word
"Will turn aside the wrath divine and quench the omen heard.
"Bring here the queen of Indraplain." Then spoke he soft to her.
"Thou still art queen of Indraplain. All men are wont to err.
"My son has done an evil thing; but if the Prince do ill,
"I still, as father of the Prince, may grant what boon I will.
"Choose thou whatever wish thou wilt." Then she in glad surprise
"Freedom for all of us I choose," responded. "Thou art wise,"
Said Thronheld. "Haste thou from this town, go with my full accord,
"Free are ye all, upon my oath, who have the final word."
Then stood they free in Hastina because the monarch spoke.
But Hardheart running found his chief: "Now slip they off the yoke.
"Hast thou not heard? Our father's fear has all the plot undone.

"Thronheld has set the Pandus free and lost is all
we won."
Swift to old Thronheld strode the Prince in wrath:
"Blind even of soul,
"What? Shall I run for victory's prize and thou de-
stroy the goal?
"Wilt thou release the trap I set, to trap thyself and
me?
"O senile fool, too long a king, thou heart of kadal-
tree,
"All show without and weak within. Speak, make
them slaves again,
"Our Hastina in ruin lies, if they reach Indraplain."
"I cannot change my royal word," said Thronheld,
"but I weep
"To make thee angry where my heart thy love and
trust would keep.
"I would but save our Hastina from ill. Bring back
again
"Our cousins. I have still a plan to make their ven-
geance vain."
They brought the Pandus to the hall again, and old
and weak
Spoke Thronheld trembling on his staff: "Dear cou-
sins, let us seek
"The end of strife. I freedom gave, but now I give
you more.
"I render back whate'er ye lost, give all ye owned
before,

"If Battlestrong again will pit his skill at dice with ours.
"Now listen to old Thronheld's words and test again your powers.
"If not, then are ye free, indeed, as promised; but not there
"Where ye have lived; your town is ours. So, if to play ye dare,
"We gamble not for slavery now, but only banishment.
"Risking the selfsame lot for each, and so may war prevent.
"Who loses, either ye or we, for twelve long years shall roam
"As hermits through the woods, unarmed, and know no other home.
"But when a dozen years have passed, they shall come back again
"And rule their town and have their wealth, Hastin or Indraplain."
Thus, fearing Fate and fearing man, he spoke, a feeble thing,
Who once was ruler of the north and now but half a king.
The cursèd dice rolled swiftly twice for virtue's sure defeat.
But half the town of Hastina thronged down its broadest street
When they went forth to banishment, whom half the people loved

And deemed their lords, had justice but prevailed; so now they proved
Their sympathy and followed close behind, with whom Vidur
Went hesitant. But when he knew their purpose: "Folly sure,"
Said Battlestrong, "has led your hearts, what would ye here today?
"Poor hermits of the woods are we, who through the world must stray
"For twelve long years. Go back again." But to Vidur: "Afar
"Our mother lives in Indraplain. Give her a home, and war
"Prepare in thought and deed abroad, among our allies all.
"Tell them the fatal day will come and let them wait our call.
"For never shall our hate decrease and ne'er our purpose fail
"Till o'er the graves of Kurus slain their wives and children wail."

The Pandus kept the bond. Exiled,
They yet their hearts with hope beguiled;
To whose luxurious hermitage
Came many a priest and courtly sage,
Who, hither thither wandering, bore,
Shuttling the threads that weave a war,
The secret messages of those
Who Hastin's pride would fain oppose.
But oft they stayed and, deep imbued
With wisdom, eased that solitude
By telling tales of bygone days
And Fate's inexplicable ways:
How dice king Nala once betrayed,
And him and Damayanti made
A fugitive and wretched pair,
Abandoned to year-long despair,
Till fortune blessed them at the end;
Since gods the virtuous aye defend;
How Rama suffered banishment;
How once a king a-hunting went
And saw a princess on a log
Whom magic base had made a frog;
How once a fearful deluge drowned
The earth and only Manu found
A refuge, with whose sons began
Our race, called, for its founder, man.
These and an hundred other things,
Adorned to please the ears of kings,
Recalling stories known of old,
The priests and sages deftly told.

But when the years of peace were o'er,
The world stood panoplied for war.
From sea-embracing Dwaraka,
From the high town of Drupada,
From east and west, against the north
The allied armies hastened forth,
Long trained in secret hope of this
Great day, when Arjuna and Kris,
Resplendent, in their van, should shine
And lead them; on a power divine
Relying, since the cause of Right
Was theirs and where is right is might.
But many as their forces were,
Fast bound by oath to do and dare,
Yet twice their number Hastin drew
From towns the Pandu overthrew
When climbing to the place which long
The genius of grim Battlestrong,
Surmounting every height of fame,
Had held, till that disastrous game
Made him an object for their jeers
Whom loud they had extolled for years.
Now, fearful of his fresh renown,
They swarmed against him, town by town,
With all the implements of war:
The noble knight's swift speeding car;
Its stallions fierce; the beast-with-hand,*

* The elephant, *hastin*. Hastina is the "Elephant-town."

Lashed to whose sides those fighters stand
Who fire and noose and poison-snakes
Let fly, whate'er confusion makes;
Crowds armed with knives and slings—the slaves
A single warrior slays or saves
From his high car. For, as he goes,
The knight's impetuous chariot mows
Them down, and, where he stands at rest,
There safe beneath his flag and crest
They gather, guarded and defense,
Till from a similar eminence
Another knight his foe espies
And one against the other flies,
Trampling the black men's cowering mass,
Through whose unnoticed woes they pass
To single combat; but the fall
Of one great knight his followers all
Disbands, who helpless roam about,
And wild distraction ends in rout,
Which evening's truce restores again.
Thus on the Kurus' fateful Plain,
Which south from Hastina extends
To where the Sacred River blends
Its silver stream with desert sands,
Met, struggling, their unnumbered bands—
The Pandus' seven huge armies, flung
Against the double force which clung
Around th' Invincible's Leaders. They,
Used to small armies, led astray
By their own size and, joint by joint,

Pierced by the sharper needle-point
Of Pandu squadrons (led by those
Whom Battlestrong's keen wisdom chose),
For all their bravery died in vain,
Their thousands on the Kurus' Plain
Rolled back upon themselves, till night
To every day gave brief respite—
Bhishma, whom Arjun slew, and Dron,
For whose death Clearlight should atone
Erelong, proud Karn, and Salya, last
Of Kuru chiefs, who dying passed
To Aswatthám, old Drona's son,
His office, crying, "Lead them on;
"I die; lead on!" Yet all for naught
The Leaders' valor proved, for, caught
In their own mass, their troops at length
Yielded to skill their bulkier strength,
Till, facing overwhelming odds,
The Pandus, aided by the gods,
Swept, victors, o'er the field and knew
That their success was sure. For few
Remained to see and none to fight,
When the last evening hid the flight
Of Kurus, and (as if his poor
Spirit to prove) the Prince of Kur,
Th' Invincible, who fled the field,
Through fear of death his form concealed
In mud and filth. But Bhima found
And, clubbing, raised that skulking hound,
Thrust a like weapon in his hand

And bade him fight; at whose command
The coward, shrinking, smote, but he,
The Fearful, warded easily
The futile blow, upraised his mace
And struck the Kuru on the face,
And, as his foeman sank, again
Raising his club, with motions twain
Smashed both his thighs and left him there
To die; so perished Thronheld's heir,
Whom vultures ate. But, o'er the ground
Of battle hunting, Bhima found
Vile Hardheart too, who at the last
Reaped what he sowed, for Bhima cast
Humanity aside, his vow
Fulfilled, cried out, "I thank thee now,
"Great God," and, like a savage beast,
Pierced Hardheart's breast and (on that feast
Abhorrent gloating), knelt and laughed
Like a hyena, as he quaffed
The gushing blood, which once he swore
To drink and now upon that gore
Glutted his rage. So Hardheart died,
And Bhima's soul was satisfied.

THE NIGHT OF VICTORY

That night at length the cares of day
Relaxed, and, victors in the fray,
The Pandus held the Kurus' tent,
Whose silk and gold embellishment
Moved them to scorn; yet there to be
Was sign of their great victory,
So there they slept. Across the field
Bright fires their guarded camp revealed,
While, in the neighboring jungle lost,
The remnant of the Kuru host
Found shelter where it could, no more
A marshaled army waiting war,
But fugitives, who sank to rest,
Exhausted, on the jungle's breast.

But Aswatthám, their Leader, drew
No peace from rest, for when he threw
His wearied limbs upon the ground
And sought repose, no sleep he found
To soothe his soul, but cast his eye,
Restless, where Kripa lay, near-by,
And Krita, who alone had gained
Safety with him and now remained
Sole Leaders, where to lead was naught,
Thus Aswatthám, the Horseman, fraught
With troubles, lay, and lying wept,
Half dozing; for in dreams he kept

The angry images of day
Which fevered sleep drove not away.
It was as though the silence drear
Still echoed shouts; as if his ear
Still caught the sound of twanging bow,
And in his dream he cowered low,
As if he still the dart might feel;
Still rang the clash of steel on steel,
And still before his darkened eye
He saw the Kurus turn to fly.
He heard the voice of Arjun call;
He saw his father, Drona, fall
'Neath Clearlight's blow, and seeing strove
T' avert the blade, which nathless clove
The form beloved; the sweat of dread
Dampened his locks; as if the dead
Called out for aid he smote the ground,
And woke, but silence wrapped him round.
His eyes were dim with dream-drawn tears,
His heart beat loud with needless fears,
And, scornful of himself, he raised
His head, and turning, upward gazed.

Then he beheld in wan moonlight
A god-sent omen of the night.
Above him bent a lofty tree
And in its branches could he see
A flock of crows that long had fed
Upon the corpses of the dead,
Until the day of carnage ceased

And darkness robbed them of the feast.
But, as he shuddering turned aside,
The carrion fowls from sight to hide,
Behold, a white owl, stealthy, slow,
Flew mid the branches to and fro,
And silent, tireless, here and there,
Attacked its victims in their lair,
Till, gorged and dulled, each fell and died,
Unable to escape. Then cried
The Horseman: "Lo, the gods have sent
"This omen. Wearied, slaughter-spent,
"And helpless as the crows, will be
"Yon host that sleeps on victory.
"Across the field of blood they lie;
"Now let them wake, but wake to die."

Inspired by that grim omen given,
He roused the twain: "Behold, 'tis Heaven
"Has shown us how to turn our flight
"To sudden victory in the night.
"Come ye; abide their gates without,
"Till from within ye hear me shout,
"But when ye hear, repeat the cry,
"And when the sleepers wake and fly,
"Do ye hew down at either gate
"The slaves escaping to their fate."
Across the field they swiftly went.
No god to Clearlight warning sent.
But Aswatthám at either side
Stationed the two. A moat ran wide

Around the Pandus' camp and north
And south two doorways opened forth,
To give the army exit. There
Kripa and Krita stood, with bare
Expectant blade and mailèd coat,
To hear the shout. But o'er the moat
His perilous way the Horseman made
And, wading, swimming, ceaseless played
With danger, till at length he crept
Amongst the tents where wearied slept
The Pandus' host. Then gliding slow,
He passed the guard which, to and fro,
Upon a listless, careless round,
Secure in victory, watched the ground.

But as within the Horseman stole,
The fire of passion swept his soul.
He saw where, floating o'er the rest,
Shone bright the Leader's moonlit crest,
And knew that 'neath that moonbeam's ray
The slayer of his father lay.
Upon his hands and knees he went
And snakelike sought that hated tent.
Shunning the warder placed before
And crawling past the guarded door,
He softly reached the rear and made
A stealthy entrance. In the shade
Of the dark tent the Leader, prone
Upon his low couch slept alone.
Straight at his form the Horseman sprang,

While through the frightened army rang,
High shrilling to the startled sky
The Kurus' well-known battle-cry:
"On, Kurus, on; to victory sure;
"Strike, for the sacred House of Kur!"
Far-reaching ran the shrilling call
And terror, speeding, smote on all,
For, ere the cry had echoed forth,
'Twas answered from the south and north,
And, waked to fight, the drowsy foe
Deemed night had brought their overthrow,
While, half benumbed, in every shade
They saw a Kuru foe arrayed.
Friend struck at friend, confusion reigned,
And few the doors of safety gained.
For like the blows of tireless Fate
The twain smote those who reached the gate
And ever o'er the heaps of slain
The battle-cry they raised again,
Till, with the exits piled with dead,
Krita and Kripa inward sped
And stalking through the shrinking crowd
Of dazed opponents, forward ploughed
With ceaseless strokes, until despair
Left few to cry for mercy there.

But as the Horseman sent the shout
Which put the dreaming host to rout,
Upstarted Clearlight from his sleep,
And heavy with his slumber deep

Looked wildly round. The Horseman raised
His weaponed hand and fury blazed
From his black eyes to see the foe
Whose arm had laid his father low.
"Stand up," but even as he spoke
His angry hand held not the stroke.
The fire of hate was in his vein,
The mist of madness in his brain,
He saw a white face in the dark,
That gleam he made his weapon's mark.
High swept the blade, down came the blow,
The victim sank, while to and fro
Wide rolled the eyes; the spirit fled,
And Clearlight, Drupad's son, lay dead.

Not long the Horseman stood to view
The lifeless corpse of him he slew
Thus basely; out he stormed and flung
The Kurus' cry abroad and swung
With such glad strength his mighty arm
That none who met it 'scaped its harm,
For like scared cattle on a plain
The Pandus' fright made fleeing vain.
Their Leader slain, their chiefs afar,
What heart had they for deeds of war?
They saw, where'er they turned, a knight
Close-armed, with hand upraised to smite,
They heard the cry that oft had proved
Death's herald to their friends beloved.
With sleep bemused they turned to go,

But going sank beneath the blow;
For, everywhere at once, the three,
So swift their onslaught, seemed to be,
And, aided by the god of flight,
They made mad havoc of the night.
For as the red war-planet streams
Its light against the cold moonbeams
And girds the Hare-god's weaker light
To strength amid the gods' fierce fight,
So ranged the Horseman at the side
Of either friend; no blow fell wide;
But when they weakened, he was strong
And still the blood-stream flowed along
Until, before the night had fled,
Among the dying and the dead
They roamed at will, who from defeat
Had risen to victory made complete.
But in the morning, ere the sun
His flaming course had well begun,
Escaped from death across the plain
The warder of the Leader slain
With faltering footsteps sought the tent
Where Arjun lay. His wild lament
Rang knell-like on the ears that heard,
For as a proud high-soaring bird
Feels, as it flies on dauntless wing,
The fatal arrow rend and sting,
And headlong falls and so is found
Mangled and piteous on the ground,
Thus, them, on wings of triumph raised

To heavenly heights, his utterance grazed,
Piercing their souls and (striking through
Their hearts exultant) earthward drew
In shattered pride, whose hopes were slain,
Who, rising, soared to fall again.

But when the first surprise was o'er,
They questioned close the news he bore:
"Is Drupad killed? Is Clearlight gone?
"Was there no chief to lead you on?
"What, sleeping slain? And all destroyed?
"Our conquest vain, our victory void?
"No god to warn, no man to dare?
"Panic and ruin everywhere?"
But still, as to their lips there sprang
Each eager hope, the answer rang,
"All, all are gone, for some are fled,
"But more are numbered with the dead,
"Who, dazed, resisted, found their fate.
"The Pandus' camp is desolate.
"The Horseman, Drona's son, is there,
"Whom Krip and Krita escort bear;
"Their feet still roam the camping-ground."

Scarcely had Arjun heard the sound
Of that worn warder's faint reply
Before he reached the steeds near-by.
Quick to the pole the chargers pressed
And yoked and harnessed sought the west.
As if they felt the urgent need,

Their quivering flanks grew hot with speed
And, bounding o'er the earth, they neighed
Their shrill delight. The breezes played
With their long manes and swift and far
Rolled o'er the plain the warrior's car.

Far stretched ahead the level field.
Corpses still armed, by day revealed,
Lay ghastly in the rising sun
And showed what man to man had done.
But little recked the speeding Knight
Of those slain yesterday. His sight
Ran ever forward to the west.
With strength untamed his stallions pressed
Through mangled bodies o'er the Plain.
His left hand grasped the fourfold rein,
His right, the jeweled scimitar,
But still in vain his foe afar
He sought, till near the further side
Of that long waste of slaughter wide,
He saw with blazing straining eyes
Three forms on the horizon rise,
Which swift advancing clearer grew
Until he knew them well. Then flew
His taunting words to greet the three:
"What, have ye robbed the dead," cried he,
"That ye, who sneak by night to slay,
"In cars of heroes ride away?"

The clanking wheels that jarred the ground
The taunt of scornful mockery drowned,
But Aswatthám, the Horseman, saw
More than he heard. He knew the law
Of knightly strife and felt the jeer
He barely caught; felt too the fear
Which stouter spirits turned to flight
When fronted by the Silver Knight.
With anxious eye he searched the Plain
With frightened glance looked back again,
Where Krit and Krip behind him came,
In reverence to his short-lived fame;
Yet pride could not their wonder brook
Should he for refuge seem to look.
Dark Fate already clogged his breath;
He checked his steeds and waited death.

But as the two knights leaped to earth
And sword in hand each other's worth
As warriors measured, braced, intent,
A wonder from above was sent:
Out of the deep blue morning sky
Great Indra thundered from on high,
And 'tween the startled champions came
A sudden flash of blinding flame,
While like a bell, of silver made,
Sounded a voice that clearly said:
"Peace, warriors, peace. Give fighting o'er;
"For ended is the grievous war.
"The Pandus now shall take their own;

"The right is theirs and theirs the throne.
"The ghost of him whose seed on earth
"Gave both to Kur and Pandu birth
"Am I, the founder of your line,
"Who now declare the will divine.
" 'Tis Vyasa speaks, 'tis God's desire:
"Quench here your ancient hatred's fire;
"In mutual grief let discord cease
"And live henceforth for joy and peace.
"Go, Drona's son, the House of Kur
"Of Pandu kindness now assure.
"Go Pandu's son, so called, in truth
"The son of Indra, say that ruth
"Must conquer wrath, as Indra's ire
"Of storm and stress and lightning fire
"Passes at length and proves to be
"Prelude to earth's felicity,
"When storms are stilled and lightnings cease,
"And harvests come and fruitful peace."
But when that light and voice had passed,
The knights to earth their weapons cast.
"The will of Heaven what fool defies?"
Said Arjun; "come where Hastin lies.
"There will the priests of Battlestrong
"Chant loud the Consolation-Song
"For those whose dearest here have died.
"Let us together, side by side,
"To Hastin fare and teach the earth
"How war to lasting peace gives birth."

THE CONSOLATION-SONG

Burn ye his body now, but keep
The memory of his ardent soul.
For him that died why selfish weep?
Rejoice; for he has reached his goal.
His work was but a web to weave.
Well woven now, his work is done;
But he who wove it lives. Why grieve
That he the highest prize has won?
For heaven awaits the man who dies
With level eyes outstaring death;
To God's own paradise he flies
Who, still unflinching, yields his breath.
Upon this path our fathers went;
Upon this path our sons should fall.
No hero's life is vainly spent,
And Indra knows his heroes all.
Transient are worldly things and lost
Within the winking of God's eye.
We are as bubbles, caught and tossed
Upon the sea of life, who die
Only in form; immersed, and part
Of life's great ocean, still we live.
Weep not for death, O sorrowing heart,
For death a happier lot will give
To him thou mournest; nor complain
That Heaven is hard and God unjust.
Man reaps whate'er he sows. 'Tis vain
To cry to Heaven; what must be, must.

The words, the deeds, the very thought
Of former lives are potent still
And make our fate. Ourselves have wrought
And given ourselves the good and ill
We now enjoy and suffer. They
Ye mourn have blissful died; no grief
Is theirs; why sadden them today
With tears belying your belief?
Who nobly die, have died too well
To mourn. Be joyful for their fame.
The ground is hallowed where they fell,
And deathless glory crowns their name.

When now the war was won and Battlestrong
Sate crowned as emperor, lord of all the earth,
They who had done his pride and glory wrong
Humbly and openly his greater worth,
Admitted, but no more. His loveless sway
Silenced their tongues but more inflamed their hate,
Though to all outward seeming died away
Their useless wrath. Resigned to him and Fate
The conquered knelt, as into silence passed
The loud vociferous wailing for the slain
And sorrow's formal pomp; but memory cast
Its shade on many and life appeared as vain
To those who lived but in a day gone by
And hopes foregone. For tears at length depart,
But time that dries all rivers cannot dry
Grief's inner font, whose well-spring is the heart.

And even they whose victory was his own,
Battlestrong's friends, whose sons, to lend him fame,
Had died, embittered were to see his throne
Encompassed now by those they held to blame
For dear ones slain. In a winter hopelessness
All thus as one bewailed joy's summer lost,
For few there were not visited by distress
And few whose sill death's footstep had not crossed.
Then Battlestrong made penance and at prayer
Saw his great father's phantom, even as one
Come down from heaven, who stood with snow-white
hair

And burning eyes, but mistlike, like the sun
Half hid, to whom as suppliant poured he out
His heart and cried, "O father, take the yoke
"Of hate and grief away, till jealous doubt
"And wrath long nourished leave this saddened folk."

Then spake that phantom, "Power with ghosts have I;
"Whom once I ruled, they still my voice obey.
"Now get thee hence where Jumna's waters lie,
"What time the moon rivals the light of day,
"Thou and thy folk. The stream shall comfort thee;
"And they, their dead behold." His voice was stilled,
And Battlestrong, not knowing what should be,
Prepared the folk to gather as he willed.
So at that time when the full-breasted moon
Should rise o'er Jumna's waters, from the town
The wondering folk came, eager for the boon
The spirits should grant, and e'en at morn sat down
Awaiting night, impatient of delay,
And watched the stream till daylight wholly fled;
But like an hundred years seemed that long day
To them who wistful hoped to see their dead.
Then lo! the moon and bright the shining wave
And a path of gold; but they, as in a dream,
Marked how a mist athwart the river drave,
Like a white curtain woven o'er the stream,
And, gazing rapt thereon, they saw erelong
Faint forms within, which from the Jumna rose;

And soon above the river a dense throng
Moving but mute had gathered. Thick as snows
Coursing a wind-swept field they silently
Appeared and gleaming hurried here and there,
Till all were marshaled close and orderly,
Like warriors fit for war. As through the air
Veiled in the mist they went, some held on high
Their bows and swords, while some on chariots passed,
And some like chieftains strode commandingly,
But still half hid and dim, till at the last,
While they, who sat and the great vision saw,
Held fast their breath, lest sound should weaken sight,
And looked upon that wonder in deep awe,
Suddenly on those shadows flashed a light,
Glorious, and behold, they knew their dead,
Yea, all the heroes whom their hearts had kept,
And each looked on the loved one Death had led
Away from light to darkness; but they wept
Tears of great joy, seeing their dead again,
And marveling, for brighter than of old,
In lustrous raiment shone the mighty slain,
And on their foreheads gems and crowns of gold.
And yet more strange, those martial faces held
No sign of anger, nor their forms of hurt,
But they whom hate had slain, their hate dispelled,
Looked kindly on each other and, though girt
With all their ancient arms, they showed no trace
Of ancient wrath, for hate with death had died,

And those who once fell battling face to face,
Stood calm, like boon companions, side by side,
While him the watcher hated as the foe
And slayer of him he loved, with him he killed
Walked now as friend, nor any sign of woe
Appeared among them. Every face was filled
With happiness, and some serene content
Greater than earth bestows. Their arms they wore
Like knights expectant of a tournament,
To whom the coming play a pleasure bore
And toil was joy. To them upon the bank
They beckoned, speaking not, but waving smiled.
So, clan by clan uprising, rank by rank,
The shadows marched and as they passed beguiled
All hearts of grief, which now but selfish seemed,
So glad appeared the dead in life's release,
Till they that saw their bliss had well-nigh deemed
That only those still lacking death's great peace
Were to be wept, for whoso dying fell
Bravely, his task, whate'er it was, well done,
Looked happier than the living. Thus the spell
Held in its blest enchantment everyone,
While 'neath the moon, seated by Jumna's stream,
He watched again his lost ones, till the light
Faded and each, as waking from a dream,
Saw the loved phantom slowly fade from sight.
But when at last dawn coming kissed the earth,
The silent vision of the joyous dead
Had vanished quite and with the sun's new birth
They that had mourned went homeward comforted.

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